

**Submission by:**

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**Submission theme:**

Arrangements for children aged under 16 years

**Subject matter:**

Preliminary findings from an Irish Research Council funded study conducted in 2017 which I consider relevant for the review of the Gender Recognition Act process

**Details of the Study:**

In partnership with the Transgender Equality Network of Ireland (TENI) and funded by the Irish Research Council, I conducted a research project entitled *Exploring Gender Identity and Gender Norms in Primary Schools*. This in-depth qualitative research was conducted in 2017 with:

- 11 parents of children aged 6-12 who are gender non-conforming/gender-diverse and who had accessed the services of TENI
- 6 educators (principals and teachers) in primary schools who had accessed the services of TENI

**Key Preliminary Findings:**

***General***

- Each parent reported that their child was gender non-conforming/gender-diverse from as early as they could communicate.
- In all aspects of life, parents considered themselves to be particularly vulnerable because their child was under 12. Despite their child continuously and consistently communicating that they were gender non-conforming, the parents felt judged, undermined and vulnerable to accusations that they had somehow 'encouraged' their child to be gender non-conforming/gender diverse.
- In situations where the parents' relationship had broken down and one parent was supportive and one was resistant to the child's gender identity, the parent who was supportive was left in a particularly vulnerable position.
- Some children in this study were gender fluid and parents reported pressure from family and society to identify as either a boy or a girl.

### ***Healthcare***

- Many parents reported distress related to significant inconsistencies in the practices and knowledge of the professionals/clinicians with whom they were in contact.
- Some parents reported much anxiety related to long waiting lists and worried about the distress that the onset of puberty would cause.

### ***School***

- The parents described significant struggles on an everyday basis in primary schools that left their child feeling isolated. These were related to gendered uniforms; toilets; pedagogical practices that continuously divided boys from girls; sports, teams and activities; religious sacraments.
- Parents reported significant fears, vulnerabilities and uncertainties regarding admissions to local single-sex secondary schools.
- Educators consistently reported an absence of knowledge related to supporting gender non-conforming/gender-diverse children with the result that the onus was often on the parent to support and educate school staff and procure resources. In this regard, the economic/social/cultural capital of the child's family was a significant factor in the everyday well-being of the child at school.
- Some parents reported stressful relations with their school. An absence of clarity about best practice resulted in some educators being either resistant to the child making a social transition or pressuring the child to 'come out' as transgender.