

EXTERNAL EVALUATION REPORT SUMMARY

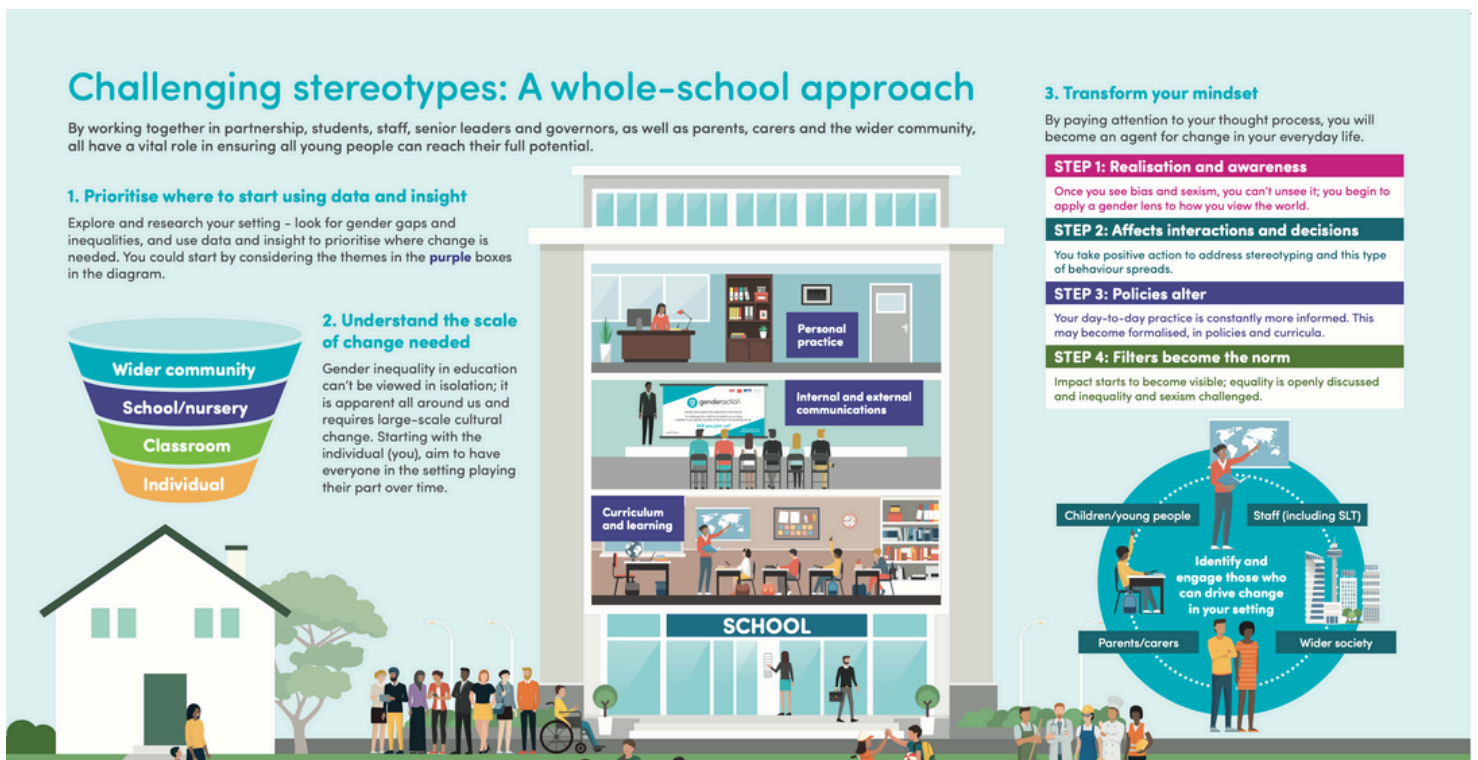


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Summary by Helen Griffin

ABOUT THIS REPORT

This summary report, synthesises the findings of the 2025 external evaluation of the Gender Action (GA) Programme. GA is an awards programme for nurseries, schools, and colleges designed to support and recognise work towards gender equity. Founded by institutions including the University Council of Modern Languages, UCL Institute of Education, King’s College London and the Institute of Physics and led by DECSY (Development Education Centre, South Yorkshire), GA’s fundamental goal is to “support educators to challenge gender inequity in their Schools so that all students can achieve their personal best regardless of gender identity”. The programme targets persistent issues like the male dominance of STEM fields, viewing these imbalances as manifestations of societal stereotypes.

The core philosophy of Gender Action is that the impact of individual changes is limited, making a whole-school approach essential for achieving a fundamental shift toward gender equity. The evaluation focused on seven schools (five primary, two secondary) that engaged in the programme across London and Yorkshire and the Humber, many serving areas characterized by high deprivation.



Evaluation Methodology Overview

The evaluation gathered data using baseline and follow-up staff surveys (128 baseline, 115 follow-up responses) and student surveys (391 baseline, 220 follow-up responses). In addition to this, in-depth interviews were conducted with eight members of staff and three student groups at four participating schools. Due to small sample sizes, the analysis primarily relied on descriptive statistics and qualitative data to identify and explore patterns.



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IMPACT ON SCHOOL CULTURE AND LEADERSHIP

The evaluation found a strong alignment between the restorative practice, citizenship goals, and general ethos of the participating schools and the Gender Action objectives. GA was effective in making gender equity a priority for schools and empowering designated Gender Action Leads.

GA Leads reported feeling motivated and empowered by the Programme's structure, including the emphasis on a whole-school approach and dedicated support from the GA team. This empowerment translated into tangible, structural changes across schools:

- At School D, co-leads achieved mixed-gender sports games at lunchtime, successfully challenging internal staff resistance and the headteacher's initial concerns about physical differences between boys and girls.
- School C's lead implemented work on consent with Early Years groups, demonstrating a proactive approach to preventing issues seen in secondary schools.
- School E integrated careers sessions into the Year 6 curriculum, challenging stereotypes and increasing awareness of different roles available to children.
- School G focused on harassment and addressing misogynistic behaviour among male students, triggered by internal student feedback.

The Programme also increased staff awareness of gender issues. In five of the seven schools, a higher proportion of teachers listed gender equity issues that mattered to them in the follow-up survey, often using stronger or more detailed language (e.g. shifting focus from general sexual harassment to "freedom from sexual assault, bodily autonomy").

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TEACHERS' CONFIDENCE AND UNDERSTANDING

A significant positive finding was the increase in staff confidence and understanding regarding gender equity.

- **Confidence in Training:** In all seven schools, more staff members reported having gender equity training in the follow-up survey than in the baseline. Overall, the GA training was reported to be successful in giving staff the confidence to manage issues of gender equity.
- **Shift in Consciousness:** Teachers described a fundamental transformation in their awareness, moving to “seeing it everywhere now”. GA helped teachers recognise that their personal biases were often unintended and unconscious results of pervasive societal gender differences. This understanding removed judgement, allowing staff to take responsibility for stereotypical actions without experiencing blame.
- **Non-Judgemental Approach:** Teachers felt equipped to have conversations with students in a way that was “non-judgemental and non-shaming and more curious and reflective”. For example, one teacher felt confident enough to scrap a lesson plan to discuss Mary Anning and celebrate trailblazing women after boys refused to engage with activities deemed “not for them”.
- GA was praised for providing the academic resources, data, and theory necessary for staff to engage intellectually with gender issues, helping them link awareness to purposeful action.

CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S VIEWS

Students interviewed overwhelmingly opposed gender stereotypes, linking them to injustice. They supported the idea that anyone can choose any activity or career, regardless of gender.

Students primarily attributed their less stereotypical views to gaining experience (e.g. meeting people who defy gender norms) and formal education within the school. The concept that gender is socially constructed—exemplified by lessons on the historical shift in gendering colours like pink and blue—was particularly effective in challenging rigid thinking.

However, the evaluation noted a crucial distinction between attitude and behaviour: lead Maggie cautioned that older children often “will tell you exactly what you want to hear”. Despite strong anti-stereotyping sentiments, behaviour often lagged, leading to persistent gender segregation of play (like boys dominating the football pitches).

The gendering of subjects was most apparent at the secondary school (School G), where students selecting engineering or creative digital media (CDM) often fell into gendered patterns.

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IN YEAR 4, I THOUGHT ONLY MEN CAN BE PILOTS, ... ONLY A WOMAN CAN COOK, AND STUFF LIKE THAT. AND THEN, ESPECIALLY IN YEAR 6, WE LEARNED MORE ABOUT GENDER ACTION AND STUFF LIKE THAT. AND THEN I CHANGED MY MIND.

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PERSISTENT CHALLENGES AND BLOCKS



OUR BIGGEST CHALLENGE. ... IT'S HARD TO EVIDENCE THE CHANGE WITHIN THE PARENTS. AND A LOT OF OUR PARENTS AS WELL, IF YOU GET TOO POLITICAL, THEY DISASSOCIATE. SO, IT'S HARD TO EVEN GAUGE THEIR UNDERSTANDING OF GENDER STEREOTYPING



Several challenges impede the full realisation of gender equity in schools:

1. Community and Parental Attitudes: Staff, particularly in primary schools serving areas of high deprivation, reported “fighting against the community”. Many parents hold very traditional attitudes to gender issues, making it difficult to secure parental buy-in or consent for activities. Teachers noted feeling ill-equipped to challenge views they believe are coming from the home environment.
2. Misogynistic External Culture: In secondary schools, staff cited the pervasive impact of misogynistic online cultures and manosphere influencers (like Andrew Tate) on male students, leading to inappropriate and sexist behaviour that required targeted education and behavioural intervention.
3. The Limits of ‘Freedom of Choice’: A key intellectual block identified is the pervasive use of ‘freedom of choice’ by both staff and students to explain why behaviours align with stereotypes (e.g. girls don't play football because they "just don't want to"). This rationale masks the structural and social influences shaping choices (e.g. not wanting to be the only girl playing football) and can block teacher intervention by suggesting the status quo is fair because opportunity exists.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

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WHAT GENDER ACTION OFFERS US AS A SCHOOL IS VALIDATION ABOUT THE THINGS THAT WE'RE DOING FOR THE KIDS, BUT ALSO THE OPPORTUNITY TO EXAMINE WHAT WE DO TO ENSURE WE ARE GIVING ALL THE KIDS THE BEST LIFE CHANCES WE CAN

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The evaluation confirms that the Gender Action Programme is supportive and helpful and successfully raised staff and student awareness within a short timeframe. To sustain and develop this critical work, the following suggestions are offered:

1. **Address Local and Online Cultures:** Develop strategies and resources to give staff confidence to engage students in conversations about misogynistic and stereotypical ideas encountered online and in the community.
2. **Focus on Choices and Behaviour:** Recognise that changing behaviour is harder than changing attitudes. Educators must move beyond merely providing opportunities and actively address situations where students feel excluded from traditionally gendered activities. Training should include critiques of the simplistic idea of 'freedom of choice' to help teachers understand structural influences.
3. **Build in Longitudinal Evaluation:** To effectively measure GA's success in its ambitious goal of addressing gendered subjects and careers, the Programme needs to incorporate longitudinal evaluation that tracks students' study and career trajectories over time.

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Working toward gender equity requires recognising that traditional, narrow ideas about gender limit aspirations, cap potential, and are ultimately unfair and unjust. By adopting a whole-school approach and actively challenging both visible and hidden stereotypes, schools can better fulfil their duty to shape children into responsible community members.

Find the full evaluation report [here](#)



Gender Action External Evaluation Report Summary, Jan 2026

