

# LIFTING LIMITS

“We can ALL be  
who we want to be”

## **A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH TO CHALLENGING GENDER STEREOTYPES AND PROMOTING GENDER EQUALITY IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS**

Independent Evaluation of the Lifting Limits Pilot Year 2018-2019 –  
summary report

## DEFINITIONS:

Pupil Year Groups at primary school level in England

Early Years: Nursery and Reception Classes (Ages 3 – 5)

Key Stage 1 (KS1): Years 1 and 2 (Ages 5 – 7)

Key Stage 2 (KS2): Years 3 to 6 (Ages 7 – 11)

*'We can all be who we want to be'*

KEY STAGE 2 PUPIL, LIFTING LIMITS SURVEY

**LIFTING LIMITS IS A SOCIAL ENTERPRISE WITH A MISSION TO CHALLENGE GENDER STEREOTYPES AND PROMOTE GENDER EQUALITY IN EDUCATION.**

Find out more about our work at [www.liftinglimits.org.uk](http://www.liftinglimits.org.uk)  
Read the full evaluation report at [www.liftinglimits.org.uk/pilot-evaluation](http://www.liftinglimits.org.uk/pilot-evaluation)  
Support our work and contact us via [info@liftinglimits.org.uk](mailto:info@liftinglimits.org.uk)

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# FOREWORDS



## **PROFESSOR DAME ALISON PEACOCK**

*Chief Executive, The Chartered College of Teaching and Patron of Lifting Limits*

The energy and commitment behind Lifting Limits is extraordinary. This pilot study illustrates the power of professional learning when the issue is one that adults both within and beyond school can support. Even more importantly, when the adults care, children listen.

As Chief Executive of The Chartered College of Teaching, author of many articles and books about refusing to label by ‘ability’ and as a member of WomenEd, the core messages within the Lifting Limits movement resonate with me strongly. The Early Years and Primary phases are of crucial importance developmentally and the influence of teachers and other trusted adults within school should never be underestimated.

Importantly, this pilot study was carried out within one London borough with a group of primary schools. Offering a whole school approach, the understanding and commitment of the adults grew throughout the project. Additionally, family learning was also offered and these initiatives began to shine a light on unconscious bias in relation to stereotypical language, behaviours, resources and fundamentally, attitudes.

Children were recruited as Gender Detectives and this became part of a collective endeavour to liberate thinking and consequent behaviours.

This project provided lesson plans, discussion prompts and resources aimed at supporting a new enlightened approach to issues surrounding gender and labels. The success of this pilot shows strong potential for future input via professional learning as the means to nudge behaviour.

It is my hope that this early work will lead to a much more ambitious approach in the future to provide schools with the understanding and recognition of the need to recognise the unconscious influences that bias our thinking and actions.

I commend this work to you and look forward to discussing ways in which we can work together to lift limits throughout our education system for all children, young people and their trusted adults to move beyond stereotypes towards appreciation of every child as an individual.



## PROFESSOR GINA RIPPON

*Professor Emeritus of Cognitive Neuroimaging, Aston University*

*“Children are actively searching for ways to find meaning in, and to make sense of, the social world that surrounds them and they do so by using the gender cues provided by society to help them interpret what they see and hear.” (Martin and Ruble, 2004) <sup>1</sup>*

One of the key findings of 21st century advances in our understanding of the human brain is the surprising social sophistication of human infants. We now know that babies arrive in this world with highly complex cortical start-up kits, especially tuned to social information.

And one of the most potent messages that this world has to offer them comes in the form of gender stereotypes, those handy shortcuts which describe (and proscribe) the differences between females and males, from their abilities and aptitudes to their potential achievements and probable failures.

For tiny humans, these messages may be conveyed by the clothes they are dressed in, the toys they are given to play with or the books they read, the language used to describe approval or disapproval of their successes or failures (what a pretty girl/what a brave little boy). Empirical research has shown that, from the age of about two years, children become ardent junior gender detectives, rapidly absorbing the social significance of colour coding in their world (pink for girls, blue for boys), noting that there are “boy toys” (LEGO and tractors) and “girl toys” (dolls and prams).

And it is not just toys. Gendered attitudes and expectations are also absorbed, but into the simplified logical framework characteristic of children – the school nurse is female, so all nurses must be female, the bus driver is a man so only men can be bus drivers. Between the ages of about two years to about five years, children are closely monitoring gendered labels and gendered behaviour and drawing very fixed conclusions about their world and their place in it. By the time they are about six years old, they have normally aligned themselves firmly to their own gender and made up their minds about what this means for them, what it means they can do and how they should behave. Sadly, this can also include firm beliefs about what they can't do; six-year olds don't think girls can be “really, really clever”; nine-year old girls think maths is a “boy thing” and not for them.

The Lifting Limits whole school approach offers just the enhanced awareness and eye-opening alternatives that can empower children to be aware that many more things are possible for them than a world of pink unicorns or boy-oriented construction kits might currently be offering.



# INTRODUCTION

Gender stereotypes limit children’s futures. Once the idea of ‘girl jobs’ and ‘boy jobs’ (or ‘pretty girls’ and ‘strong boys’) takes hold, the gender unequal outcomes seen in later life become almost inevitable. From the gender gap in attainment at the end of primary school, to the low numbers of women in engineering, from prolific sexual harassment to high levels of male suicide, gender stereotypes are bad for individuals and bad for society<sup>2</sup>.

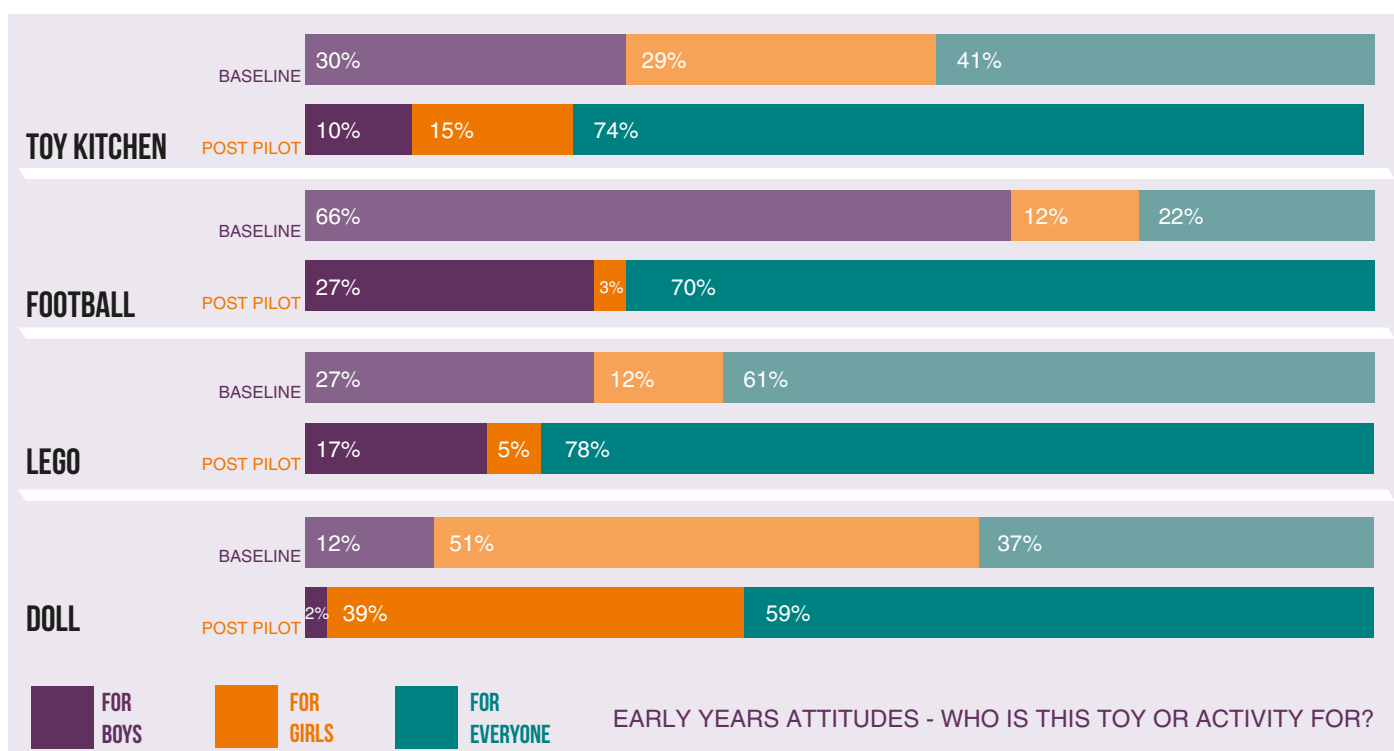
Despite children being told they can be ‘anything they want to be’, that message is often undermined by what they see, hear and experience in school. Gender stereotypes which proliferate outside the school gates are unintentionally reinforced in school, through the curriculum, books, language, staff assumptions and daily interactions with adults and peers<sup>3</sup>. This happens at a crucial stage in pupils’ development, with children’s sense of what is expected of boys and girls forming during the primary school years<sup>4</sup>.

Yet, equipped with the awareness and tools they need to recognise and correct unintentional gender bias and to equip their pupils to identify and challenge gender stereotyping in the wider

world, primary schools can become powerful agents for change. That is why Lifting Limits works with primary schools – to take action where it is most effective.

And the Lifting Limits programme is effective. Evaluated during a year-long pilot in five London primary schools in 2018-19, delivered to over 270 staff and 1900 pupils, the independent evaluation shows significant impact for staff, pupils and the whole school environment. The evaluation shows changes in attitudes, awareness, aspirations and confidence as well as in school practices and culture.

Yet, lifting limits for all children requires more than action from individual schools. It needs promotion of a whole school approach and a gender awareness – a ‘gender lens’ – to be applied throughout the system by all those responsible for educating children, including government, local authorities, multi-academy trusts, Ofsted and teacher training providers. Equality law and the policy context<sup>5</sup> demand it, and future generations of children deserve it. ■

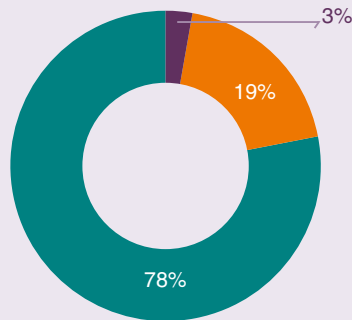


# KS1 ATTITUDES - WHO IS THIS TOY OR ACTIVITY FOR?

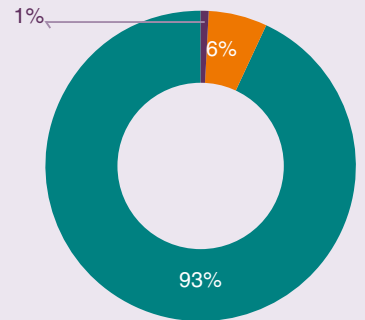


## TOY KITCHEN

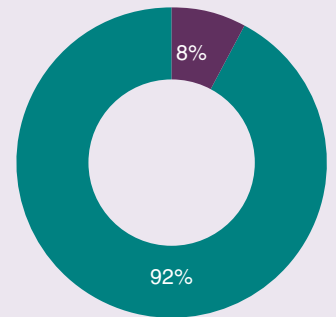
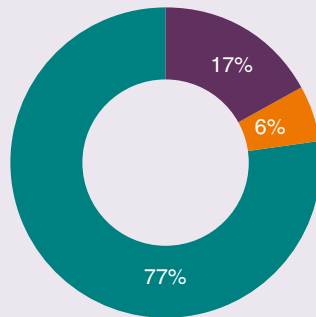
### BASELINE



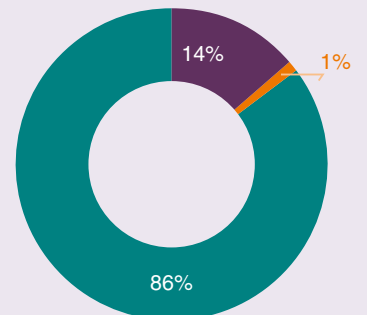
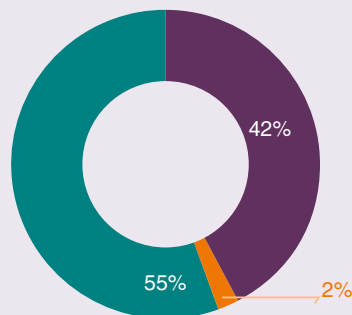
### POST PILOT



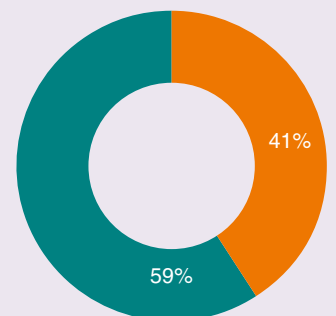
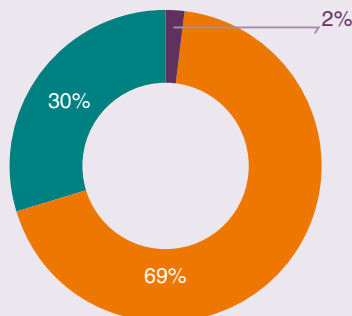
## LEGO



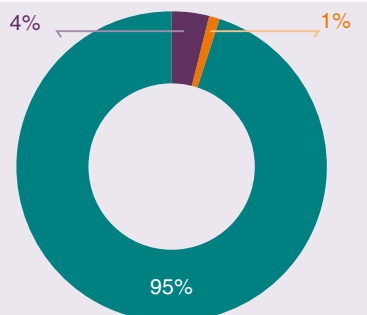
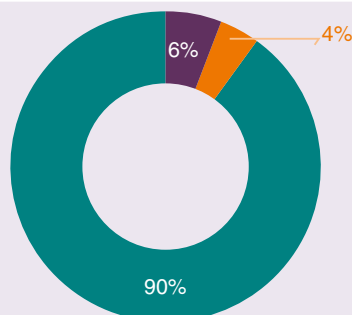
## FOOTBALL



## DOLL



## MAGNETS



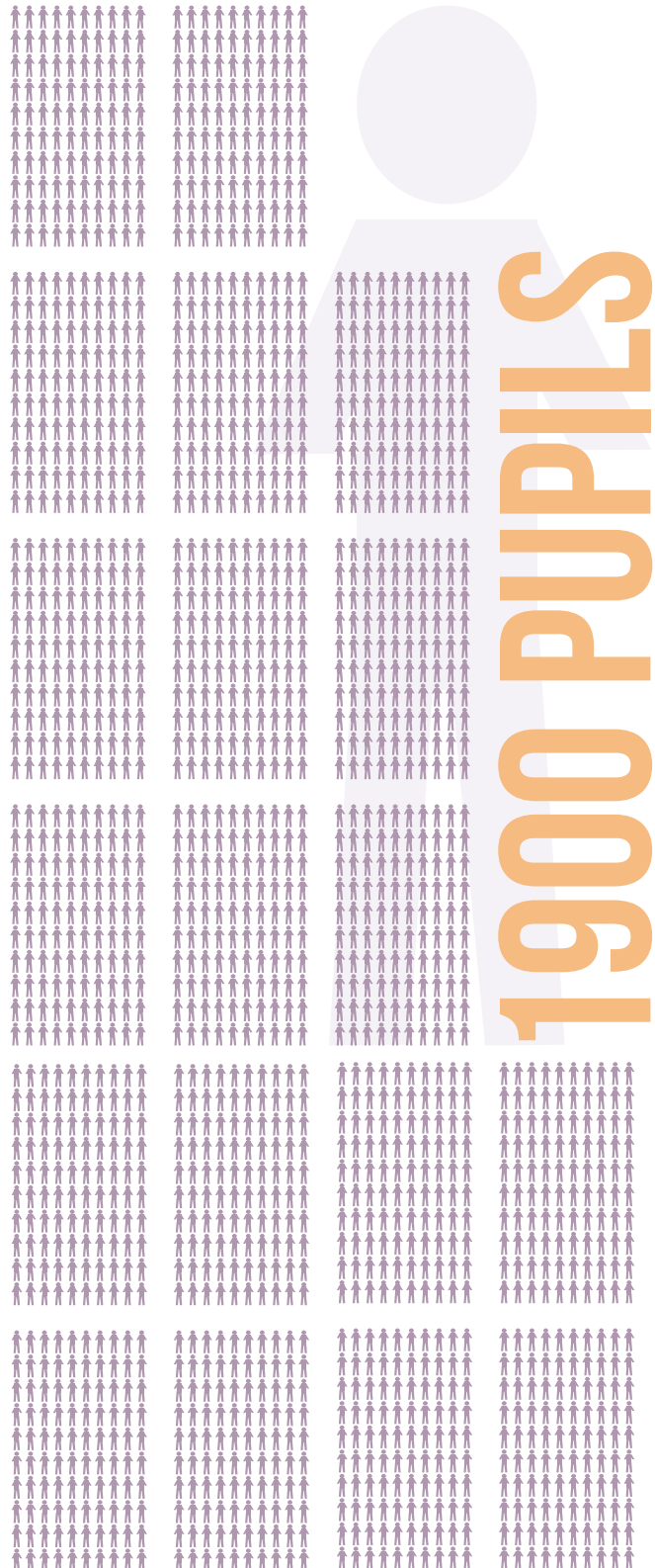
# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## THE LIFTING LIMITS PILOT PROGRAMME: A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

- The Lifting Limits programme is based on existing evidence of the need for a whole school approach to challenging gender stereotypes, involving all aspects of the school and all members of the school community.
- The programme was tested in a year-long pilot in five primary schools in the London Borough of Camden, reaching around 270 staff and 1,900 pupils.
- Key aspects of the programme found to successfully drive change include: the whole school approach; the effectiveness of the staff training (Inset); assemblies; the appointment of a gender champion in school; and the breadth and quality of the programme resources. These aspects combined to introduce a 'gender lens' and to support schools and their staff in embedding and consolidating this awareness in their teaching, practice and interactions with children.



270  
STAFF





## IMPACT

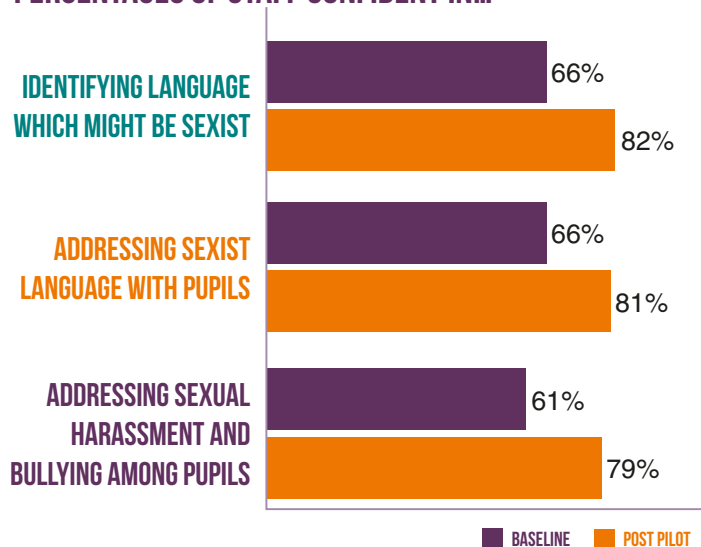
*The independent evaluation of the Lifting Limits pilot evidences the effectiveness of the programme in disrupting limiting gendered norms.*

### IMPACT ON STAFF

#### Key findings:

- Increased staff awareness and confidence in addressing sexism and stereotyping with pupils, colleagues and parents. For example:
  - 60% increase in the stated confidence of staff in explaining the impact of gendered stereotyping on children to colleagues (from 48% to 79% of staff)<sup>6</sup>;
  - 30% increase in confidence to address sexual harassment and bullying among pupils (from 61% to 79% of staff).
- Increased self-reflection feeding into changes in practice. Half of staff (50% up from 29%) now reflect 'a lot' on the messages they give children about what they can do (with a further 46% reflecting 'to some extent').

#### PERCENTAGES OF STAFF CONFIDENT IN...



**“I WAS SHOCKED ABOUT HOW MANY THINGS WERE PUTTING LIMITS ON CHILDREN WITHOUT US EVEN NOTICING THEM. I WOULD SAY OUR SCHOOL... HAS QUITE A GOOD APPROACH BUT THERE HAVE BEEN ALL THESE HIDDEN THINGS HAPPENING WHICH HAVE BEEN QUITE GOOD TO CHALLENGE THIS YEAR”**

*(Teacher, Year 4)*

*Explaining the impact of gendered stereotyping on children to colleagues*



# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY CONTINUED

## IMPACT ON PUPILS

*“I always thought that that was a thing of the past and they were equal but it kind of baffled me to know that it was still going on. When I learnt about the pay gap, I thought it was completely unequal and disgraceful for something like that to be going on.” (Boy, Year 5)*

### Key findings:

- Greater awareness and acceptance of a more diverse range of roles and possibilities for women and girls, men and boys, with particular opportunities to intervene at the Early Years stage. Examples include:
  - at the end of the pilot three times as many children in the Early Years perceive football as a game ‘for everyone’ (from 22% to 70%);
  - 75% increase in the number of KS2 boys who envisage they could be a teacher (from 24% to 42%).

EARLY YEARS CHILDREN WHO PERCEIVED

**FOOTBALL IS FOR EVERYONE**

INCREASED FROM

22%

70%

## WHOLE SCHOOL LEGACY

*“We have displays about it, we have lessons and it’s everywhere in the school now, which is good. I think that that is what you need to make it something that is just normalised.” (Teaching support staff)*

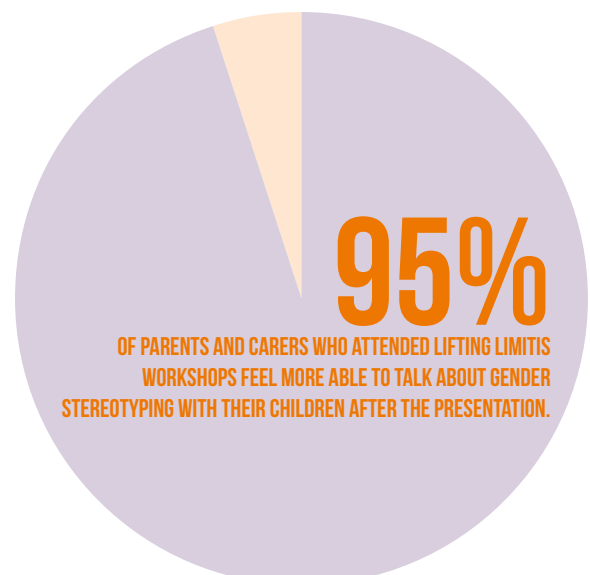
### Key findings:

- Gender equality is promoted and stereotyping reduced across the school through the curriculum, resources and training.
- Gender awareness is embedded in the school ethos and approach.
- Parents and carers attending Lifting Limits workshops felt empowered to discuss and challenge gender stereotyping with their children, with 95% feeling more able to talk about gender stereotyping with their children after the presentation.

*“Brilliant! Inspiring - I’m learning new ideas of how to empower both my son and daughter” (Parent) ■*



**INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF KS2 BOYS WHO ENVISAGE THEY COULD BE A TEACHER**



# CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- The pilot evaluation suggests that Lifting Limits' whole school approach is effective in disrupting limiting gendered norms.
- Legal and policy imperatives<sup>7</sup> exist for schools and those responsible for children's education to positively challenge gender stereotypes, promote gender equality and apply a gender awareness – or 'gender lens' – in their work and the standards they promote.
- A number of specific recommendations are therefore addressed not only to schools but also to Government, Ofsted, the middle tier (including local authorities and multi-academy trusts) and teacher training providers. The recommendations are summarised here and set out in full in the Recommendations section below.

## GOVERNMENT

- Conduct a larger-scale evaluated trial testing a whole school approach to challenging gender stereotypes in primary schools nationally.
- Use the introduction of Relationships Education in primary schools to promote teaching about gender stereotypes as part of a whole school approach.
- Allocate funding for specialist organisations to support schools and middle tier organisations in challenging gender stereotyping and promoting gender equality.

## OFSTED

- Introduce specialist training to equip Inspectors to bring a 'gender lens' to inspections.
- Assess when carrying out inspections whether specialist training on unconscious bias and gender stereotyping is a core and substantive part of initial teacher education.

## MIDDLE TIER ORGANISATIONS (such as local authorities and multi-academy trusts)

- Build expertise and capacity to actively promote a whole school approach to gender equality throughout their school networks.
- Review training, policies, resources and schemes of work through a 'gender lens' to ensure practices do not reinforce gender stereotypes.

## INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING PROVIDERS

- Ensure, through specialist training, that those responsible for training teachers are themselves 'gender aware'.
- Ensure specialist training on unconscious bias and gender stereotyping is a core and substantive part of initial teacher training.

## SCHOOLS

- Implement a whole school approach, covering school ethos, organisation, teaching practices and curriculum, to challenge gender stereotyping and promote gender equality, with explicit and visible support from school leadership.
- Recognise the Early Years stage as an opportunity for early intervention.

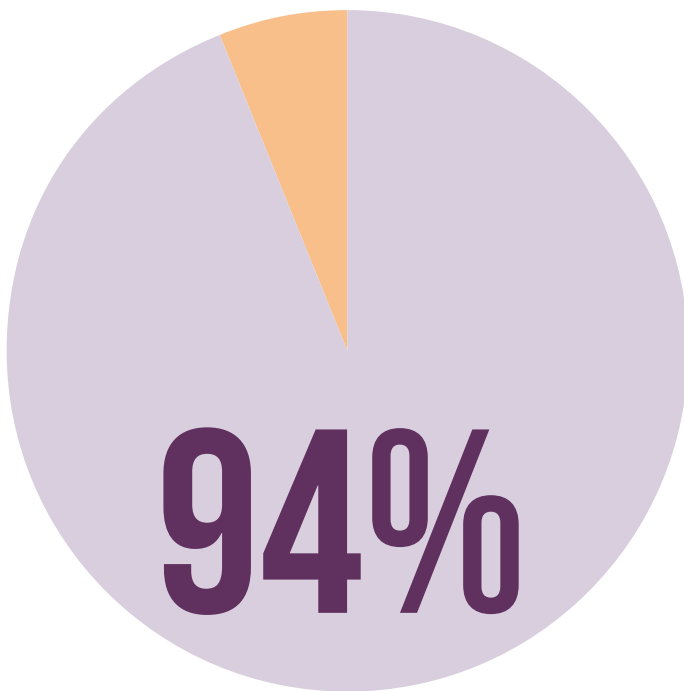
## READ THE FULL EVALUATION REPORT AT

[WWW.LIFTINGLIMITS.ORG.UK/PILOT-EVALUATION](http://WWW.LIFTINGLIMITS.ORG.UK/PILOT-EVALUATION) ■

# LIFTING LIMITS: A WHOLE SCHOOL APPROACH

“EYE-OPENING”

“EXTREMELY THOUGHT-PROVOKING”



OF STAFF AGREED ‘THE PRESENTATION HAS ENCOURAGED ME TO WANT TO REFLECT ON GENDER STEREOTYPING IN MY OWN PRACTICE’.

## PROGRAMME PILOT – 5 SCHOOLS, 270 STAFF, 1900 PUPILS

Throughout the academic year 2018–19 Lifting Limits ran an independently evaluated pilot, testing its evidence-based<sup>8</sup> whole school approach in five primary schools in the London Borough of Camden. The programme reached over 270 members of staff and 1900 pupils.

The purposes of the pilot, and external evaluation of it, were for Lifting Limits to:

- test the impact of its programme against a set of intended outcomes;
- seek detailed feedback from schools on individual elements of the programme; and
- learn from pilot schools what works well, or not, to embed gender equality work in schools.

The evaluation findings confirm the strength of the Lifting Limits model. The following elements of the programme, taken together, have been crucial in bringing about change:

- **Whole school approach:** exploring gender messaging in relation to all aspects of the school and engaging all staff members.
- **Gender Audit:** to identify and support areas for development in the school.
- **Inset:** a two hour training session at the start of the year for all staff, to raise consciousness and promote self-reflection, was consistently highlighted as essential for engaging the whole staff body in the issues.
- **Gender Champion:** appointed from the staff body to drive the programme in the school and support colleagues in bringing about change.
- **Resources:** a comprehensive package of resources including National Curriculum compliant lesson plans for years 1-6 in each of 12 subjects and for Early Years and an extensive range of school-wide resources such as assemblies, discussion cards and language and playground guides for staff. In addition to lessons



specifically addressing stereotyping and gender equality, resources aim to improve gender balance across areas of the curriculum, and to develop pupils' critical thinking skills.

*"They have produced brilliant resources. They're split into year group and they're split into subject areas...so they're all tailored to what is in the national curriculum so that work has already been done for us. We don't have to map it to year groups and map it to subjects."* (Gender Champion)

*"If you don't have a lesson, you can open it 10 minutes before and it's good to go. All the key questions are there. All the thinking is there."* (Teacher, Year 6)

- **Assemblies:** highlighted as vital for engaging pupils in the issues and reinforcing key messages, not only with pupils but also with staff when present.

*"We were doing an assembly and I always remember this one as I gasped so loud and everyone started looking at me. Our head teacher she was doing an assembly and normally builders are men. And my mum really wants to be a builder and that's why I gasped"* (Girl, Year 5)

## THE PILOT SCHOOLS AND THEIR STARTING POINTS

The five schools taking part in the pilot were all committed to challenging gender stereotypes in the school environment. Some schools started the pilot knowing they had work to do, others had already been proactively working on gender equality and were keen to see if they were as far along as they thought.

- Baseline data confirms existing research that pupils, even at the most conscious schools, are not immune from the negative influences of gender stereotyping. For example, pupils' career aspirations were highly gendered with boys

accounting for two thirds of those with science related aspirations<sup>9</sup> and girls for 84%–93% (depending on key stage) of those selecting teaching. Pupil perceptions of who certain toys and activities are for were also highly gendered.

- The baseline audit showed gender stereotyping to be reinforced in schools through: curriculum and displays (with scientists, composers, artists, inventors, explorers and historical figures overwhelmingly (white) men); books<sup>10</sup>; gendered play patterns; and assumptions (Year 6 children said that staff 'assume boys will be bad and girls will be good, and that's not fair').
- Prior to the pilot, only a third of staff had received training on gender stereotyping and inequality<sup>11</sup>, suggesting that staff are not always equipped to identify, let alone address, the many ways in which gender stereotyping can be reinforced 'below the radar' in schools on a daily basis.

## INDEPENDENT EVALUATION

The evaluation was conducted by an independent researcher, Tessa Horvath, using a mixed methods approach combining: a literature review; staff and pupil surveys at the start and end; questionnaires for staff and parents and carers following Lifting Limits presentations; mid-pilot interviews with Gender Champions in each school; interviews with school staff, pupils and with Lifting Limits staff; and findings from gender audits carried out by Lifting Limits at the start and end of the pilot. Evidence was explored in relation to a number of intended outcomes of the pilot for staff, pupils, schools and parents.

The evaluation report, setting out the full findings on impact and the methodology (including detail on data quality), is available on Lifting Limits' website [www.liftinglimits.org.uk/pilot-evaluation](http://www.liftinglimits.org.uk/pilot-evaluation)



# IMPACT: SUMMARY OF KEY FINDINGS

## IMPACT ON STAFF<sup>12</sup>

Compelling evidence suggests the Lifting Limits programme impacted staff as follows:

- » Increased understanding of gender stereotyping and the importance of addressing it.
- » Increased confidence in addressing gender stereotyping with pupils, colleagues and parents.
- » Increased self-reflection on language, planning and practice.

## INCREASED UNDERSTANDING

**“WHEN IT WAS FIRST INTRODUCED, I THOUGHT I WAS PRETTY ON TOP OF IT, BUT WHEN YOU DO LOOK AT BOOKS AND THINGS IN THE SCHOOL AND HOW THEY DO PORTRAY BOYS AND GIRLS IN CERTAIN ROLES AND COLOURS – I DIDN’T REALISE THAT IT WAS PROBABLY HAVING QUITE A STRONG EFFECT ON THEM AND IT MADE ME REFLECT ON MY ROLE TEACHING CHILDREN”**

*(Teaching support staff)*

## STAFF CASE STUDY:

### LAILA’S LIFTING LIMITS YEAR<sup>13</sup>

**LAILA IS A YEAR 4 TEACHER.** When she first found out that the school was going to be a part of the Lifting Limits pilot she was worried that the project may conflict with her own identity and choices:

*“I had a slightly negative knee jerk reaction at the beginning because I feel like I’m quite a girly girl and I was worried it was getting a bit ridiculous where you couldn’t like pink”*

However, she found the Inset presentation and literature informative and she became aware of the limitations of gender stereotyping, particularly in relation to occupations. As a result of this awareness, she became an advocate for the project:

*“All the things about language that you don’t notice how gendered it is – policeman, fireman – the language we use is already setting which gender would take those roles. So the more I got into the project the more I feel like I’ve done a 360 and now I’m such an advocate.”*

Over the pilot year Laila implemented a number of the Lifting Limits lessons alongside the Gender Detective activities with her class. She reports that engaging in the Lifting Limits pilot has made her much more aware of everyday gender stereotyping and the messages children are exposed to. This has encouraged her to question stereotyping with both her daughter and her class:

*“Actually it’s made me challenge all the small things that creep in when they start to go to nursery... [My daughter] loves dresses and that’s fine, but if she says to me ‘pink is just for girls’ I’ll say to her ‘what do you mean? Pink is just a colour – it’s for everyone. Daddy loves pink – he’s got a pink shirt’. I’m doing that with her but similarly in class.”* ■



## INCREASED CONFIDENCE

Staff confidence in identifying and addressing gender stereotyping and sexism with pupils, colleagues and parents increased for each of eight indicators, including:



## INCREASED REFLECTION

**“THE IMPACT THAT IT’S HAD IS THAT IT HAS MADE THE WHOLE BODY OF STAFF AWARE OF THE CONCEPT. I THINK THAT IT IS AN IDEA THAT IS NOW JUST IN THE COLLECTIVE MIND OF THE STAFF. IT’S SOMETHING THAT NOW GETS TALKED ABOUT A LOT MORE.”**

*(Teaching support staff)*

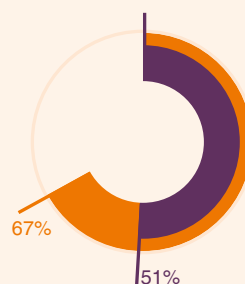
*“We’ve even changed some of our actions in French! We realised our actions for le and la were very gender stereotyped!... I started it and the children literally looked at me horrified.” (Teacher, Year 4)*

Half of staff (50% up from 29%) now reflect ‘a lot’ on the messages they give children about what they can do (with a further 46% reflecting ‘to some extent’).

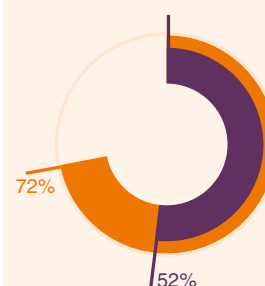
59% of staff (up from 38%) now reflect ‘a lot’ on the inclusivity of their language in relation to gender (with a further 38% reflecting ‘to some extent’).

*“I think it’s been really reflective, not just in terms of as a teacher but as a parent or as an employer, as a member of society.” (Head Teacher) ■*

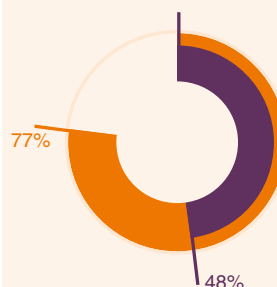
EXPLAINING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SEX AND GENDER TO COLLEAGUES



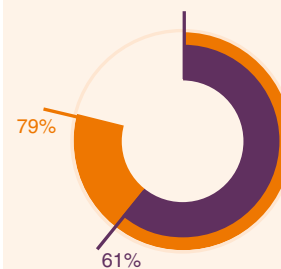
DISCUSSING ISSUES RELATING TO GENDER/SEXISM WITH PARENTS OF A SIMILAR BACKGROUND TO YOU



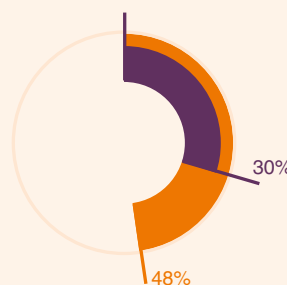
EXPLAINING IMPACTS OF GENDER STEREOTYPING ON CHILDREN’S LIVES/EDUCATION TO COLLEAGUES



ADDRESSING SEXUAL HARASSMENT AND BULLYING AMONG PUPILS



DISCUSSING ISSUES RELATED TO GENDER/SEXISM WITH PARENTS OF DIFFERENT RELIGIOUS AND CULTURAL BACKGROUNDS TO YOU



■ BASELINE  
■ POST PILOT

At the end of the pilot, the vast majority of staff (90%) felt that they have the tools, resources and support they need to address sexism among pupils (up from 74%). ■

## IMPACT ON PUPILS<sup>14</sup>

Compelling evidence suggests that the Lifting Limits programme impacted pupils as follows:

- » Increased awareness and acceptance of a more diverse range of roles and possibilities for women/girls and men/boys – both for themselves and others.
- » Increased awareness and understanding of gender stereotypes.
- » Enhanced critical thinking and ability to challenge gender stereotypes.
- » Reduced polarisation and improved relations between boys and girls.

“THE LIFTING LIMITS PILOT CHALLENGED AND BROADENED CHILDREN’S IDEAS ABOUT SEX AND GENDER. THIS RESULTED IN MORE CHILDREN BEING ABLE TO REFLECT ON THE PAST AND THINK CRITICALLY ABOUT THE PRESENT. THIS GIVES THEM THE MEANS TO CHANGE THE FUTURE”  
(Teaching support staff)

## ENDORSEMENT OF A WIDER RANGE OF OCCUPATIONS AND BROADER ASPIRATIONS

Across key stages pupils endorsed a wider range of occupations for women and men at the end of the pilot, for example:

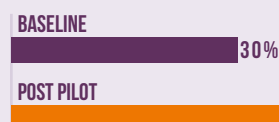
- More than double the number of Early Years children indicating that nursing is ‘for everyone’ (rather than ‘for boys’ or ‘for girls’) (from 35% to 71%)
- 49% increase in KS1 pupils indicating that being a builder is a job ‘for everyone’ (from 55% to 82%)
- KS2 survey responses suggest changes in pupils’ unconscious gender associations<sup>15</sup>, with a 48% increase in those giving a female name to a firefighter (from 29% to 43%).

Broader personal aspirations, for example in relation to two highly gendered professions:

- 75% increase in KS2 boys who selected that they could be a teacher (from 24% to 42%)
- 31% increase in KS2 girls who selected they could be a footballer (from 36% to 47%)

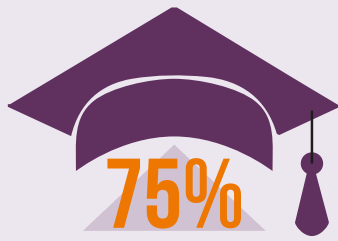
## REDUCED STEREOTYPING OF TOYS AND ACTIVITIES:

- Three times as many Early Years children indicating that football is ‘for everyone’ (from 22% to 70%)
- 97% increase in KS1 children indicating that a doll is ‘for everyone’ (from 30% to 59%)



KS1 CHILDREN INDICATING THAT A DOLL IS ‘FOR EVERYONE’





**75%**  
INCREASE IN THE NUMBER OF KS2 BOYS WHO  
ENVISAGE THEY COULD BE A TEACHER



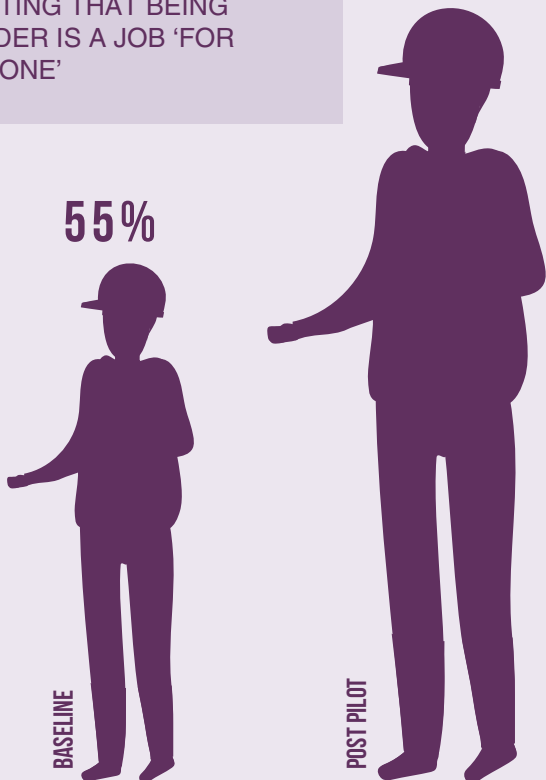
**31%**  
INCREASE IN KS2 GIRLS  
WHO ENVISAGE THEY COULD  
BE A FOOTBALLER

49% INCREASE IN **KS1** PUPILS  
INDICATING THAT BEING  
A BUILDER IS A JOB 'FOR  
EVERYONE'

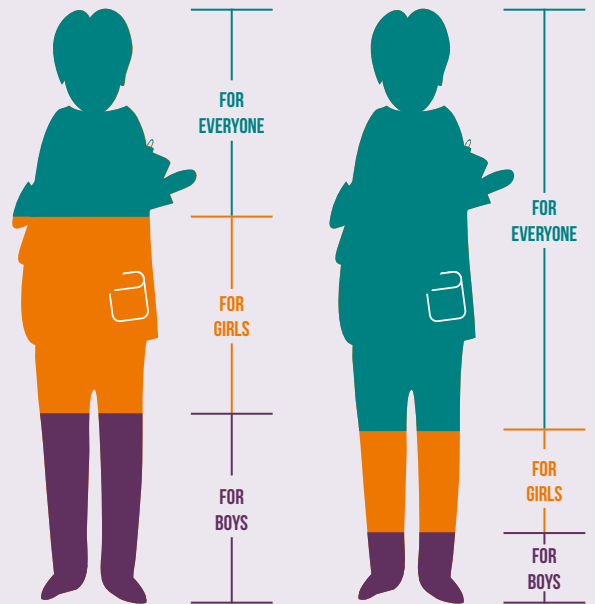
**82%**

**55%**

**BUILDER**



**NURSE**



**BASELINE**

**POST PILOT**

EARLY YEARS: POST PILOT 71% INDICATED NURSING IS 'FOR EVERYONE' (RATHER THAN 'FOR BOYS' OR 'FOR GIRLS') INCREASE FROM 35%

EARLY YEARS CHILDREN WHO PERCEIVED

**FOOTBALL IS FOR EVERYONE**



THE NUMBER OF **EARLY YEARS** CHILDREN INDICATING THAT BEING A BUILDER IS A JOB 'FOR EVERYONE' MORE THAN DOUBLED'

| <b>BUILDER</b> | FOR BOYS | FOR GIRLS | FOR EVERYONE |
|----------------|----------|-----------|--------------|
| Baseline       | 49%      | 21%       | 30%          |
| Post pilot     | 27%      | 4%        | 69%          |

## THE EARLY YEARS

Children in the Early Years were more likely than older children to explicitly perceive objects and activities to relate to a specific gender, suggesting that children absorb stereotypes from a young age and then learn to consciously unpick them to some degree as they get older.

The large reduction in Early Years pupils’ level of endorsement of gender stereotyping at the end of the pilot shows the potential to challenge these associations from a young age, heading off the internalisation of gender stereotypical messages as children grow older.

In one school there was a concerted effort to address gender stereotyping in Early Years and this included efforts to ensure equal participation in activities, use of toys and the opportunity to take part in a play in gender atypical roles<sup>16</sup>. The cumulative impact has been an observed change in the activities and objects that pupils engage with, and more acceptance among pupils of boys and girls taking part in a broader range of activities.



“ACTUALLY THERE’S BEEN NONE OF THAT STUFF THAT THERE WAS AT THE BEGINNING: ‘OH YOU’RE [A] BOY YOU CAN’T WEAR A DRESS’. THEY’RE SORT OF ACCEPTING IT MORE. SO I THINK THAT IS HUGE PROGRESS... AND ACTUALLY WE’VE MADE A REAL CONCERTED EFFORT TO MAKE SURE THAT WHEN THEY’RE PLAYING LIKE THE BOYS DON’T DOMINATE THE BIKES OR THE GIRLS DON’T DOMINATE THE WRITING TABLE.”

*(Teacher, Early Years)*



## INCREASED AWARENESS OF, AND CONFIDENCE TO CHALLENGE, STEREOTYPES - ENHANCED CRITICAL THINKING

*"It's a generalisation of either gender in a certain kind of way. So it's like fitting a group of people inside a box that they don't necessarily fit in." (Boy, Year 6)*

KS2 survey questions asked pupils what is hard and what is good about being a boy or man and being a girl or woman. At the end of the pilot responses suggest higher levels of consciousness of gender stereotyping, inequality and the limitations and challenges they present for both boys/men and girls/women.

- 26% of responses in the end of pilot survey (16% in the baseline) referred to pressure to conform to masculine stereotypes as being hard for boys and men – examples given include not playing with dolls, not showing emotion, being judged if they cry, pressure to have a good job and being expected to be good at maths.
- 21% of responses in the end of pilot survey (8% in the baseline) referred to aspects of gender inequality as being hard about being a girl or woman – examples given include the gender pay gap, having fewer opportunities than men, expectations about appearance, experiencing sexism or abuse, inequalities in other countries and historic oppression.

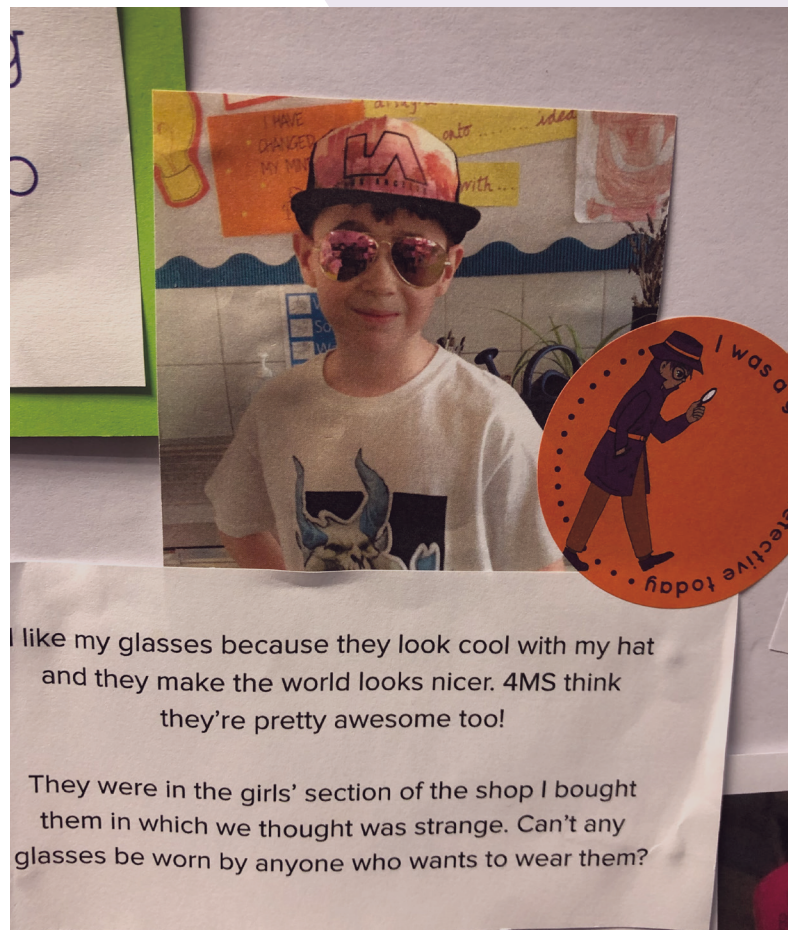
*"They jump on it when it happens and now they have the language to talk about it – they say 'Look! Lifting Limits'. I think they know how to discuss it a bit more now rather than just [saying] 'that's not fair'." (Teacher)*

*"When someone said [something sexist] last year I sort of said 'that's not right' and they said 'why? why? why?' and I couldn't think about it my mind would go blank, but now I have things to say." (Girl, Year 5).*

*"One Year 4 boy bought some [pink] sunglasses that were in the girls' section of the shop and he thought actually 'Why? These are great, they go with my hat!'" (Gender Champion)*

**"I FEEL CONFIDENT TO SPEAK  
ABOUT GENDER STEREOTYPES...  
WE JUST WANT THIS WORLD TO  
BE A FAIRER AND A NICER PLACE  
TO LIVE IN SO YOU SHOULD SPEAK  
OUT AND STOP PEOPLE AND MAKE  
SURE THEY DON'T DO IT AGAIN  
BECAUSE IT'S WRONG"**

*(Girl, Year 6)*







## MORE SIMILARITIES

### REDUCED POLARISATION AND IMPROVED RELATIONSHIPS

22% swing in KS2 children seeing ‘more similarities’ between girls and boys (from 58% to 69%), rather than ‘more differences’ (from 42% to 31%).

*“Me and some other girls now we play with the boys sometimes and I don’t think we used to and it actually feels very fun. We used to play by ourselves but now we’ve made a better relationship – we treat each other better.” (Girl, Year 4)*

*“Now I’m probably treating girls a bit better than I was before” (Boy, Year 4) ■*

## PUPIL CASE STUDY: AMIRA’S LIFTING LIMITS YEAR

**AMIRA IS IN YEAR 5.** She has been very aware of the various Lifting Limits activities that have happened in the school over the year and feels that the focus has been important for her education.

*“I think our school has been thinking about it a lot. It’s helped our education to go a bit further and think about what’s happening”*

In particular she remembers being shown a video in class which showed how people treat boys and girls differently. This helped her to become more aware of gender stereotyping and notice it in her daily life and to understand the limitations it places on boys and girls.

*“Now I notice it more as I know what’s happening more and I take more notice and it’s bad that it’s happening. It seems so wrong. Why should they be treated differently?”*

A key area of learning for Amira over the year has been gender inequality in relation to race and global injustice, as highlighted in a homework activity she was set:

*“We did homework about black women especially and how in this country we are very privileged and in other places it’s not good.”*

She also noted that she has joined the girls’ football team at school and is pleased that more people are talking about the women’s world cup.

*“Well, we do a lot about it at school. We do about it in P.E. sometimes. You have what are to be considered ‘boys’ sports’. So I joined the girls’ football team and lots of people are talking about the women’s world cup. For a long time it was just for men and barely anyone talked about it” ■*



# WHOLE SCHOOL LEGACY:

Compelling evidence suggests that the Lifting Limits programme has impacted the whole school environment.

- » Gender equality is promoted and stereotyping reduced across the school through the curriculum, resources and training.
- » Gender awareness is embedded in the school ethos and approach.

The whole school approach, driven by senior leadership support and use of the Lifting Limits resources, gave staff permission to actively focus on gender in their practice. A gender lens developed in staff practice and school routines, evidenced in a number of changes in teaching, practices and school environment.

“IT’S DEFINITELY BEEN SEEN AS A BIG PRIORITY THIS YEAR. SO YOU FEEL LIKE YOU CAN REALLY GET INTO IT. I THINK IF IT WOULD HAVE BEEN A SORT OF TOKEN EFFORT WE WOULDN’T HAVE...”

*(Teacher, Early Years)*

## CURRICULUM

All schools expressed the intention to review their curriculum to improve gender balance across pupil learning for the next academic year. In one school this review was completed towards the end of the pilot, explicitly introducing women into areas of the curriculum which opening audits had shown to be male-dominated. This was done across year groups and topics.

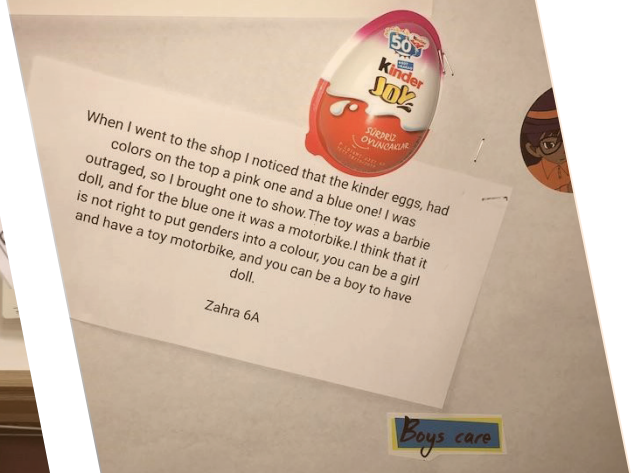
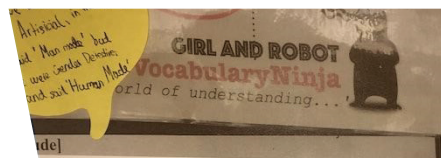
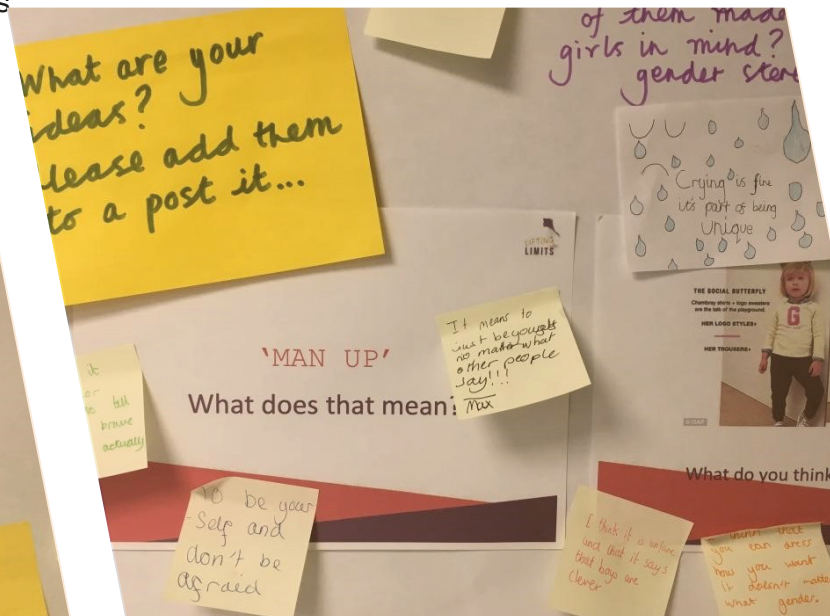
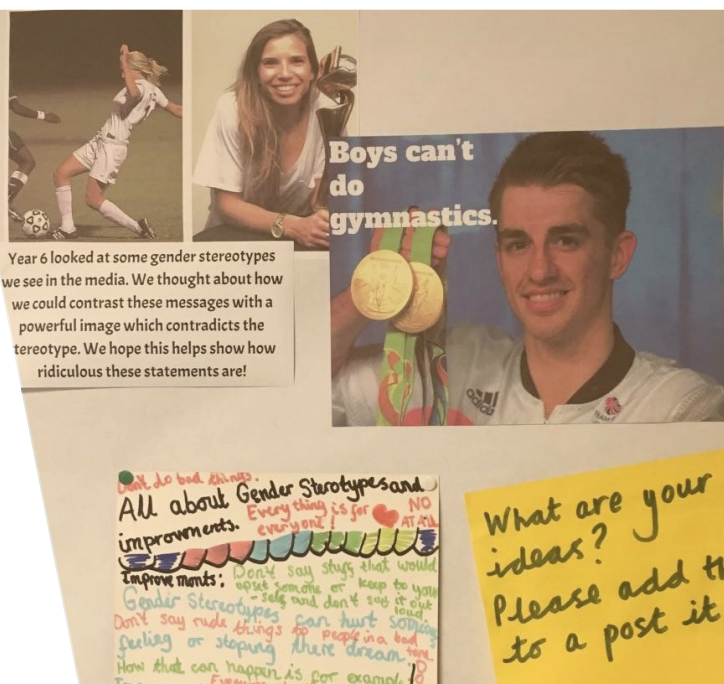
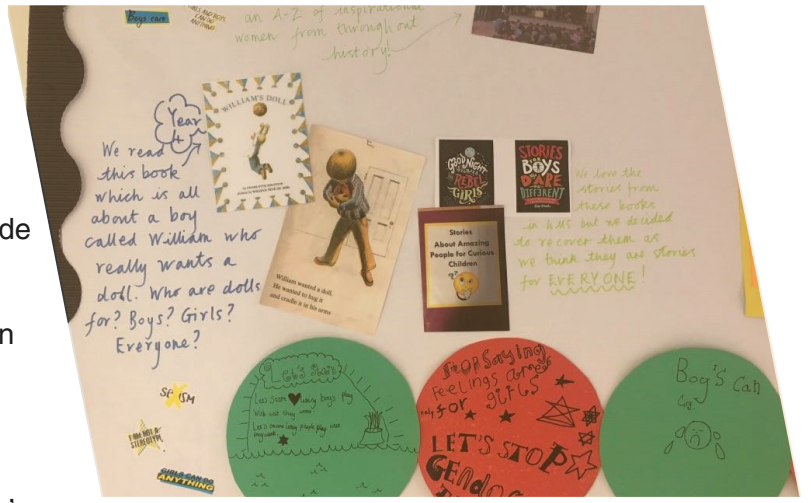
*“As part of our Inventions and Progress topic we were aware of ensuring there are female artists.... I think previously possibly there might have been lessons where there was an art project where there wouldn’t have been a woman included as well. That representation is definitely there now.”*

*(Gender Champion)*

# WHOLE SCHOOL LEGACY CONTINUED

## DISPLAYS

Closing audits showed: increased visibility of female role models and historical figures alongside male examples (for example in classroom timelines); displays of female scientists and composers raising the profile of influential women in traditionally male-dominated fields; corridor displays promoting engagement and interaction from pupils; and classroom working walls displaying ongoing work over the year related to gender stereotyping and equality, linking children's learning across different areas.





## BOOKS

Opening audits showed that books in schools reflect those in the outside world which overwhelmingly reflect gender stereotypes<sup>17</sup>. Pilot activities encouraged staff and pupils to become aware of the messages in books.

Participating in the pilot has encouraged schools to review their book stocks, to buy new books where possible and to use literature to generate discussion.

“WE PULLED OUT ALL THE BOOKS THAT HAD GIRLS IN THE BOOK AND THEN WE TOOK OUT BOOKS THAT HAD GIRLS WITHOUT ANY LINES, AND THEN WE ENDED UP BEING LEFT WITH THREE BOOKS.”

(Teaching support staff)



# WHOLE SCHOOL LEGACY CONTINUED

## ETHOS AND STAFF FORUMS

Gender awareness has permeated staff meetings and Inset sessions, both explicitly and as an intrinsic part of the questioning that takes place in these forums.

*“I think we’ve just had this complete open conversation all year that we’re all responsible for it. And so, it’s permeated assemblies, curriculum planning, lots of Insets, there’s always something that’s brought to our attention through that.” (Head Teacher)*

## PARENTS AND CARERS

Engaging families is an important element of the whole school approach. Lifting Limits ran two parent and carer workshops in each of the pilot schools.

95% agreed ‘after this presentation, I feel more able to talk about gender stereotyping with my children’.

*“Brilliant! Inspiring – I’m learning new ideas of how to empower both my son and daughter.” (Parent)*

*“My children told us about the discussions held at school and that I found very valuable and it provided an opportunity to speak about as a family and at the dinner table.” (Parent survey respondent)*

*“Two parents came to me this morning on the gates and said they really enjoyed it, it got them to think. That’s what we want.” (Head Teacher)*



## SCHOOL CASE STUDY

**THE ETHOS OF SCHOOL A** resonated well with the aims and objectives of Lifting Limits and as such, the Head Teacher was very keen to be a part of the pilot.

*“I think that a project that challenges gender stereotyping is very ‘us’ – it’s something that we really believe in.” (Head Teacher)*

The start of the pilot coincided with the school taking on a lot of new staff and there was some initial reticence to the pilot among staff. In response, the approach in the school has been to take the pilot at a pace that feels manageable for the school.

*“We’ve made a decision, because we’ve got quite a lot of new staff, to go quite slowly with it. The initial training day with governors and staff in the autumn term, staff found it really challenging, which is good.” (Gender Champion)*

The school has fully engaged with the pilot and implemented many activities over the year. Some key successes in the school include:

- Several staff members have delivered additional assemblies inspired by Lifting Limits. These have focused on challenging the role of girls in traditional stories, highlighting female role models and casting pupils in counter-stereotypical roles for school plays.
- Parents were engaged in a number of morning and evening workshops in collaboration with Lifting Limits, leading to parental involvement in delivering an assembly on global access to education for girls.
- A strong focus on promoting girls’ participation in sports through a proactive approach to make sports more accessible for girls by the P.E. lead.
- With a strong emphasis on pupil voice in the school, pupils have come forward to suggest their own activities and events, such as a sponsored silence to raise awareness of girls’ unequal access to education globally.

As a result of taking part in the pilot, there has been much more discussion about gender equality among staff and there are examples of staff reflecting more

on their practice and becoming more confident and explicit in challenging gender stereotyping.

*“What Lifting Limits has done is highlighted an issue that is always there but it’s empowered teachers to be explicit in their challenging of stereotypes” (Gender Champion)*

A teacher reflected that an area where she has seen most impact is in relation to challenging stereotypes in traditional tales, where they may not have done previously. *“Where it’s a more traditional tale, perhaps historically, it might have been a while before we got round to talking about why does this princess need rescuing again, so I think it’s impacted there.” (Teacher, Early Years)*

Pupils highlighted particular areas that influenced them over the year, including learning about gender inequality globally. *“In terms of different countries... we learned about Malala. She got shot in the head because she wanted education for girls. There are some countries where girls can’t go to school” (Boy, Year 4)*

Future plans include: to keep the focus on gender equality as an explicit part of the school development plan; to develop work to address the links between mental ill-health and masculinity; and to support teaching assistants to grow in confidence in promoting gender equality. ■

# CONCLUSIONS

The Lifting Limits pilot demonstrates the effectiveness of its whole school programme in disrupting the limiting gendered norms that children learn from a young age. The core components of the model and the whole school nature of the approach have been demonstrably effective in driving change.

Whilst individual members of school staff have an important role to play in challenging gender stereotypes, to really drive school-wide change staff need the support of school leadership through a whole school approach which brings along colleagues, sets expectations and champions change. Beyond individual schools, all those with responsibility for the content, quality and delivery of children’s education have a role to play in addressing systematically the negative impacts of gendered stereotyping on children.

In light of the evaluation findings and the legal and policy context<sup>18</sup>, a number of specific recommendations are addressed to Government, Ofsted, the middle tier, teacher training providers and to schools.

# RECOMMENDATIONS

## GOVERNMENT

- Conduct a larger-scale evaluated trial testing a whole school approach to challenging gender stereotyping in primary schools nationally, across a broad range of school types and demographics, to inform policy.
- Use the introduction of Relationships Education in primary schools to promote teaching about gender stereotypes as part of a whole school approach.
- Allocate funding for specialist organisations to support schools and middle tier organisations build their capacity to challenge gender stereotyping and promote gender equality.

## OFSTED

- In recognition of the harmful effects of gender stereotyping on children, introduce specialist training for Ofsted inspectors to equip them to bring a ‘gender lens’ to inspections so as to ensure all schools are meeting their obligations under the personal development criteria and under the Equality Act.
- In assessing Initial Teacher Education, in particular the quality of training, assess whether specialist training on unconscious bias and gender stereotyping is a core and substantive part of the training so that trainees are equipped to recognise the impact of gender stereotyping on children and to challenge it in their practice and in the school environment.

## MIDDLE TIER ORGANISATIONS (such as local authorities and multi-academy trusts)

- Build expertise and capacity within the organisation to actively promote a whole school approach to gender equality throughout their school networks, and facilitate school staff in



gaining the skills and knowledge to actively challenge gender stereotyping.

- Review training, policies, resources and schemes of work made available to schools through a 'gender lens' and ensure that policy, practices and materials when supporting schools do not reinforce gender stereotypes.

## INITIAL TEACHER TRAINING PROVIDERS

- Ensure that lecturers and others responsible for training teachers for qualified teacher status are themselves not reinforcing stereotypes through their practice, including by providing specialist CPD addressing gender stereotyping and unconscious bias.
- Incorporate specialist training on unconscious bias and gender stereotyping as a core and substantive part of initial teacher training (whatever the training route to attain qualified teacher status) and ensure that associated resources have been reviewed through a 'gender lens'.

## SCHOOLS

- Implement a whole school approach, covering school ethos, organisation, teaching practices and curriculum, to challenge gender stereotyping and promote gender equality, with explicit and visible support from school leadership.
- Recognise the Early Years stage as an opportunity for early intervention and, within the whole school approach, ensure that Early Years staff receive the training and resources they need to take this opportunity.
- Appoint a Gender Champion with a brief to drive change in school and encourage staff ownership of the gender equality agenda across subject areas and key stages.
- Ensure that data is gathered from which to identify specific gender issues (for example gendered participation or outcomes in sporting

activities, literacy or behaviour) and consider using the school's specific equality objectives<sup>19</sup> to prioritise addressing these issues.

- When reviewing the school's curriculum in light of Ofsted's new Education Inspection Framework<sup>20</sup>, apply a gender lens and take the opportunity to improve gender balance across all areas of the curriculum. ■

# ENDNOTES

1. Martin, C.L. and Ruble, D. ‘Children’s Search for Gender Cues: Cognitive Perspectives on Gender Development’, *Current Directions in Psychological Science* 13:2 (2004), pp.67-70. See also Rippon, G. (2019) ‘The Gendered Brain’, Bodley Head: London
2. <https://www.liftinglimits.org.uk/why-it-matters/>
3. NEU and UK Feminista (2017) “It’s Just Everywhere”: A study on sexism in schools – and how we tackle it; Chambers, N. Rehill, J. Kashefpakdel, E. T., Percy, C. (2018) *Drawing the Future: Exploring the career aspirations of primary school children from around the world*; Lee, V. Marks, M. and Byrd, T. (1994). *Sexism in Single-Sex and Coeducational Independent Secondary School Classrooms. Sociology of Education*, 67:2, 92-120; Culhane, L. & Bazeley, A. (2019) *Gender Stereotypes in Early childhood: a literature review*, The Fawcett Society; NUT (2013) *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff: Challenging gender stereotypes through primary education*; *Lifting Limits gender audits in pilot schools*.
4. Rippon, G. (2019) ‘The Gendered Brain’, Bodley Head: London; Bian, L. Leslie, S.J. Cimpian, A. (2017) *Gender stereotypes about intellectual ability emerge early and influence children’s interests*, *Science*, 355: 6323, 389-391; Ofsted (2011) *Girls’ Career Aspirations*. (Report reference no: 090239)
5. Equality Act 2010; *Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019*; *Ofsted Inspection Framework 2019*. See the Evaluation report for further information on the legal and policy background.
6. Throughout the report, data is reported in terms of percentage change rather than percentage point increase. Percentage change is the relative change between an original value (in this case the baseline percentage) and its new value (in this case the post pilot percentage), expressed as a percentage of the original value.
7. See note 5
8. Institute of Physics (2017) *Improving Gender Balance*; Department for Schools, Children and Families (2009) *Gender issues in school – What works to improve achievement for boys and girls*; NEU and UK Feminista (2017) “It’s Just Everywhere”: A study on sexism in schools – and how we tackle it; Women and Equalities Committee (2016) *Sexual Harassment and Sexual Violence in Schools*; NUT (2013) *Stereotypes stop you doing stuff: Challenging gender stereotypes through primary education*; Kings College London, Department of Education and Professional Studies (2013) *ASPIRES: young people’s science and careers aspirations aged 10–14*
9. In the end of pilot surveys this disparity was not apparent.
10. Reflecting the gendered nature of children’s literature: Culhane, L. & Bazeley, A. (2019) *Gender Stereotypes in Early childhood: a literature review*, p.14, The Fawcett Society; Observer (2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/21/childrens-books-sexism-monster-in-your-kids-book-is-male>
11. In school or as part of their training for their role, data from staff baseline survey.
12. Based on survey responses from 170 staff for the baseline and 107 staff at the end of the pilot, together with interviews with 23 staff members.
13. Names used in case studies for staff and children are pseudonyms
14. Based on survey responses from 1,243 pupils for the baseline and 1,150 pupils at the end of the pilot, together with interviews with 20 pupils and staff interview data.
15. Given that older children have often internalised unconscious gender stereotypes, yet have learned not to explicitly endorse them (the ‘right’ answer being that ‘anyone can do anything’), the survey for this age group sought

to test unconscious associations to gain a more accurate picture of pupils' gender biases.

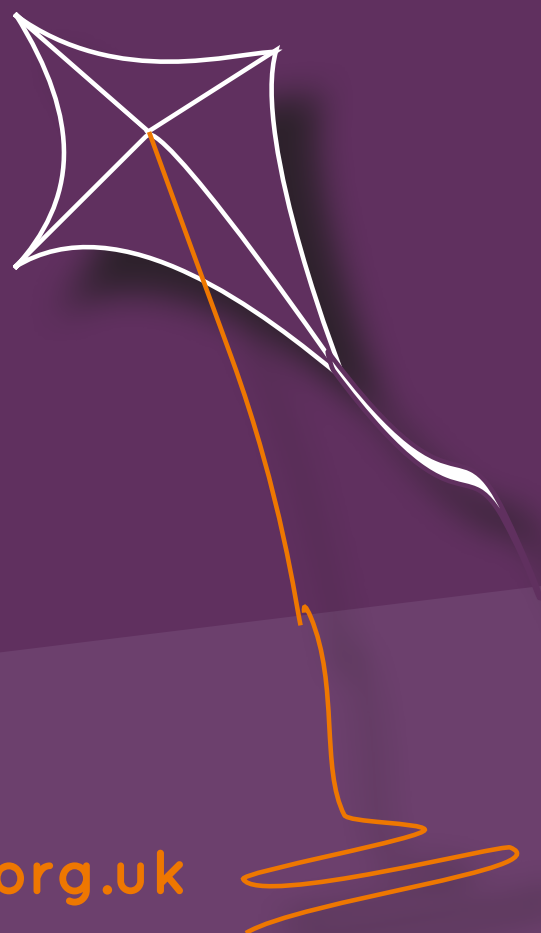
16. Eg including boys as fairies in a performance of 'A Midsummer Night's Dream'
17. Culhane, L. & Bazeley, A. (2019) Gender Stereotypes in Early childhood: a literature review, p.14, The Fawcett Society; Observer (2018) <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/jan/21/childrens-books-sexism-monster-in-your-kids-book-is-male>
18. Equality Act 2010, Keeping Children Safe in Education 2019, Ofsted Inspection Framework 2019. See the Evaluation report for further information on the legal and policy background.
19. required to be published under the Equality Act 2010
20. [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/801429/Education\\_inspection\\_framework.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/801429/Education_inspection_framework.pdf)

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Gender equality in and through education