

Dear Mr XXXXX,

A copy of this letter has been sent to the following people: Mrs XXXX, the Chair of Governors and XXXX County Council's Equality and Diversity Team.

On Friday, along with every other parent at XXXXX School, I received a letter which included the following details:

"A big well done to all those children who were entered in the reading raffle this week. The children had to read 10 times over the holidays and have their planners or reading records signed for each time. I was very disappointed however that the numbers of children entering the raffle weren't higher. Only 34% of girls and 35% of boys were entered in the raffle this week, meaning that 2 in every 3 children seem to not be reading enough at home. To try and raise this we have started a "Battle of the Sexes! The gender with the higher percentage will receive 5 minutes extra play every week. This week the boys won. Well done boys!"

I am utterly horrified that my children have been subjected to such blatant sex discrimination and I am writing to request that the scheme be stopped immediately and that a letter be sent out to all parents explaining the un-thought through nature of the said scheme.

My concerns with the scheme are as follows:

1. It is totally unjust. 65% of the male children in the school are to be given extra playtime based on their gender, even though they have not completed the required task. 34% of the girls who have completed the task will miss out on extra playtime, purely because of their gender. This is utterly unacceptable.

2. Under the Equality Act 2010 gender is a protected characteristic, meaning discriminating against a person in regard to this characteristic is considered illegal. Furthermore, the act goes on to describe indirect discrimination as,

"A person (A) discriminates against another (B) if A applies to B a provision, criterion or practice which is discriminatory in relation to a relevant protected characteristic of B's.

(2) For the purposes of subsection (1), a provision, criterion or practice is discriminatory in relation to a relevant protected characteristic of B's if—

(a) A applies, or would apply, it to persons with whom B does not share the characteristic,

(b) it puts, or would put, persons with whom B shares the characteristic at a particular disadvantage when compared with persons with whom B does not share it,

(c) it puts, or would put, B at that disadvantage, and

(d) A cannot show it to be a proportionate means of achieving a legitimate aim."

The protected characteristic that is gender has been discriminated against in so much as the children have been told that all the female pupils will be penalised, while all the male pupils are to be rewarded. This in no way can be seen as a proportionate means of achieving a higher level of parental participation in reading at home.

For these reasons I would suggest that the school has corporately and intentionally invested in indirect discrimination.

Other protected characteristics in the Equality Act include race and disability. Would you do the same type of scheme with black children versus white children or children with a disability versus children without a disability? I imagine this would not be done, so I am confused as to how the protected characteristic that is gender is being treated with such negligence.

3. As an international speaker and trainer on ending violence against women I find the scheme reprehensible. When working to prevent gender based violence with primary school aged children, one of the key messages we must be sending out is that gender is not a barrier to any child. The foundations of abuse of women lie in the belief abusive men hold of women being inferior. In light of this, any scheme which specifically aims to polarise genders is detrimental to promoting healthy and equal relationships.

Much research has been done to show that reinforcing gender barriers can cause unhealthy beliefs to develop, which can lead to the choice to abuse.

4. My husband and I work very hard to ensure that my children never see their gender as defining or limiting them in any way. The fact that, on a school wide scale, the school has undermined this is totally unacceptable. We do not want our children to be told that they are in any way limited by their gender and the fact our daughter has been told she is to miss out on 5 minutes playtime, purely because of her gender, has said to her that her gender is a barrier. That because she is female she has somehow failed to meet a standard. Our son will gain 5 minutes playtime purely because of his gender which suggests to him that his gender determines what rewards he will get. In a society in which men are consistently paid 20% less than women in the same job, this is a message I do not want to be promoted to my son.

I appreciate that if the girls had a higher percentage of readers, they would be the ones being rewarded, while the boys would be the ones being penalised. This also is completely unacceptable.

5. The idea of introducing a "Battle of the Sexes" to a school is indefensible. In the UK 25% of women will experience abuse from a male partner and a woman is assaulted in her own home every 6 seconds. Globally the reality for women is horrific, with female genital mutilation, forced marriage, rape being used as a weapon of war and countless other attacks being launched on women, because they are women. There is already a "Battle of the Sexes" going on, and for a school to buy into the same gender based dynamics is unacceptable.

I appreciate that this scheme may not have been thought through, and for this reason I am not pushing for anything other than for the scheme to be terminated immediately,

for the planned playtime on Thursday to be open to all children of either gender who did have their reading record signed and for parents to be informed that gender based competitions of this sort are not an appropriate way of engaging pupils. Such a communication to parents will need to take place by Thursday 26th April 2012, as the next reading raffle is due to take place on Friday 27th April 2012.

I am saddened to have to approach this issue in such a way, but as the scheme has already begun on Friday 20th April 2012, I feel I have no choice but to take such a confrontational stance.

I hope to hear from you in due course.