

face equality

EDUCATION



Disfigurement in schools

One in every 500 children/young people in the UK has a significant facial disfigurement – two in every major school.

Common causes are:

- birth conditions like birthmarks, cleft lip and palates, cranio-facial syndromes
- a traumatic injury like a burn, scars from an accident or dog bite
- an illness such as cancer or as a result of surgical treatment for it
- skin conditions like eczema, acne or vitiligo.

Changing Faces believes that teachers and educationalists need to understand that all pupils and students with disfiguring conditions are vulnerable to 'facial prejudice' and 'facial discrimination'. However, many pupils do have positive experiences at school and this is due mainly to the culture that the school creates.

The Disability Discrimination Act 1995 – later amended to include schools – established disfigurement as a disability, and makes it unlawful to discriminate against a pupil with a disfigurement. However hundreds of parents and young people have contacted *Changing Faces* reporting difficulties at school.

The reasons for change

There are several unconscious prejudices which can disadvantage children and young people with disfigurements at school: for example, because other pupils and teachers may believe that 'good looks' are essential to success, they may inadvertently assume low expectations and can be patronising or overly sympathetic.

Similarly, if they associate disfigurement with low IQ, pupils can be treated unfairly.

Worst of all, other children can be very cruel if one of their peers looks unusual. Children with disfigurements often experience staring, name-calling and other forms of bullying.

Changing Faces carried out a small-scale survey in January 2008 of how young people with disfigurements viewed their school experience and sought comments from our young people's website (www.iface.org.uk). Both confirmed that problems persist.

'People tease me at school and I don't know what to do about it.'

'At break time I still get the occasional comments and whispers and so on from younger kids that don't even know me. It's well horrible. Like today, this boy proper laughed at me and stared right into my face, he was like leaning across my shoulder to look. That proper made me annoyed and upset the whole of the day.'

One parent said of her daughter, **'She only recently moved to secondary school – all has been ok but she endured four years of bullying at junior school. This has led her to not mixing well with her peers and whilst she enjoys school and engages fully in**

all aspects, I feel she is still isolated – or ostracised – by other girls her age.'

Getting it right

Schools that get it right do so because:

- Teaching staff display positive attitudes and behaviours towards pupils with disfigurements – and have high expectations about their future.
- The school creates a culture of inclusion for all students.
- The school is well-equipped with information, skills and resources to handle the challenges of disfigurement with confidence.
- The curriculum contains strong lessons on Citizenship and follows the Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning (SEAL) programme – making the link with subjects covered within those lessons with issues relating to disfigurement.

Changing Faces has been at the forefront in developing effective resources and interventions to enable this to happen. Please see our Teachers' Guides available for download on our website, www.changingfaces.org.uk. However, there is still much to be done.

Many schools need a long-term strategy in relation to supporting pupils with disfigurements and enabling other students to interact and relate to them in a confident and positive way. In doing so, they can provide a robust foundation for their pupils to prepare them in their future roles as employers, teachers, parents and citizens.

For further information go to www.changingfaces.org.uk

What you can do

Stand out. Show your support for face equality

Changing Faces calls on the education system to ensure that all staff are adequately trained to develop a culture and practice of inclusion for pupils with disfigurements, eliminating facial prejudice and discrimination.

We call on the Department for Children, Schools and Families, and those departments at devolved and local levels, schools, colleges and universities to adopt three key principles for education for pupils with disfigurements:

1. Become familiar with the causes and effects of disfiguring conditions

All teaching professionals should be informed about the causes and effects of disfigurement and should be trained to stamp out bullying, teasing and prejudice in the classroom.

2. Adopt positive thinking about people with disfigurements

Schools should test out their own attitudes towards disfigurement and develop more inclusive thinking and behaviour – and should commit to Face Equality Weeks.

3. Adopt new ways of behaving when you meet someone with a disfigurement

Schools should make sure that staff are adequately trained to identify and address the psychological and social welfare needs of their pupils/students within their personal development curriculum (eg: with access to psychological and social support).

Changing
faces
the way you face
disfigurement

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