

# Girls believe they have 'less influence' over primary school life

By SHÂN ROSS

Female pupils believe they have less influence over many aspects of school life, including what they learn, eat, uniforms, school trips and which sports are played, according to a study by the University of Edinburgh.

The research, the first looking at pupils' influences rather than attainment when moving from primary to secondary education, suggests boys are more confident their views will be listened to, leading to girls becoming more cynical about their lack of influence early in their school days.

This can result in girls "self-excluding" themselves from pupils councils, feeling less confident in expressing opinions in front of their peers.

Dr Jane Brown, Dr Linda Croxford and Sarah Minty from Moray House school of education's centre for research, inclusion and

diversity, say schools should develop pro-active solutions encouraging girls' participation.

Dr Brown said girls' lack of confidence could impact on career and job prospects.

"One of the school managers said that when it came to elections for the school council girls did not like to stand up in front of the class and say what they were good at.

"This is a time when they need to be really upfront and say 'I'm really good at this, this is what I can do for you'".

One of the main findings was that 70 per cent of P7 boys said they influenced what sport is played while the figure for girls was 54 per cent.

Sexism was also uncovered with girls tending to become playground "buddies" which researchers said "may reflect expectations regarding the caring propensity of girls."

Over 700 P7 and S2 pupils were questioned and focus groups for 130 youngsters

from 25 schools undertaken.

Andrea Bradley, assistant secretary, education and equality, at the Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) teaching union, said: "The EIS has issued guidance to members highlighting how important it is to 'Get it Right for Girls' in school in the context of the structural barriers girls and young women can face in a society which routine demeans and undervalues women's contributions.

"Curriculum for Excellence aspires to all young people becoming 'confident individuals' and 'effective contributors': it is vital that these capacities are developed equally by girls and boys.

"Our members consistently tell us that they need more support – time, resources and training – to enable them to address inequalities, including those evidenced by this important research."

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