Gender Diversity in Primary Schools

MIC – Teaching for Inclusion Series
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Education Officer

they/them

Transgender Equality Network Ireland

Transgender Equality Network Ireland

TENI seeks to advance the rights and equality of all trans and gender diverse people in Ireland

We have four key areas of work:

- Education
- Healthcare
- Legislation
- Support

Gender Identity

The gender with which you identify
Your identity as a woman, a man, another gender or no gender

Gender Expression

Clothes, hair, make up, accessories, behaviour traits
Things that we would often think of as masculine or feminine

Sex/Gender Assigned at Birth

Chromosomes, hormones, reproductive organs and external genitalia

Cisgender

When a person's gender identity and the gender they were assigned at birth are the same

Transgender

When a person's gender identity and the gender they were assigned at birth are not the same

Transgender Man

Someone who identifies as male but was assigned female at birth

Transgender Woman

Someone who identifies as female but was assigned male at birth

Non-binary

Someone who does not identify as either male or female

Transition

Social Transition

Coming out to people, changing name/pronouns, changing clothes, hair, etc.

Young people under 16/17 only engage with social transition.

Legal Transition

Legal name and gender change, updating birth cert, passport, driving licence, etc.

Medical Transition

Hormone replacement therapy, gender–affirming surgery, laser hair removal, speech and language therapy.

The Role of the School

As a social environment, school is only ever supporting a social transition.

It is not the role of the school to seek legal documents, medical diagnoses or any other form of 'proof' from young people or families.

Refusing to acknowledge or suppressing a child's identity will not make that identity go away.

It only creates a sense of shame or wrongdoing in the young person, and will make it harder to them to express themselves in other areas and later in life.

The role of the school is to ensure the best outcomes for students in terms of learning, development, wellbeing – taking a holistic approach.

Responsibilities of the School

Department of Education

Circular 045/2013
Requires that teachers:
- cover LGBTQ+ identities
- support students in using LGBTQ+ inclusive language
- challenge LGBTQ-based bullying
- inculcate empathy and respect for different identities

Irish National Teacher's Organisation

Recommend supporting social transition
Have best practice videos on this and other topics on their site
- into.ie/lgbt

Equal Status Acts 2000-2018

Transgender rights covered under 'gender' and 'disability' grounds
Cannot treat people differently based on their gender or any medical/psychological diagnoses

If a Student Comes Out to a Teacher

Many reasons they may do this

- One good adult
- Testing adult reactions
- Pushing parents to engage

Responding to a young person coming out

- Centre them, not your reaction
- Thank them for telling you
- Ask clarifying questions if needed i.e. around language
- Ask who else they have told

Next steps

- Try to organise meeting with parents
- Try to reach consensus with everyone

Working with Families

Families/parents might experience a range of emotions

- Can feel angry, upset, confused, or a sense of loss
- Likely to be feeling vulnerable in relation to the school
- Importance of school in young person's life – opportunity

Families may resist supporting the child

- Consider giving it a month and revisiting with principal
- Framing around supporting child and wanting the best for them – this is also the parents' concern
- We recommend reiterating that this might not be forever, but it is for now, and supporting their child will help them to continue to develop and to have a positive relationship with their parents
- What spaces can the child be supported/affirmed?
- How can we keep the child informed so that they know they are supported?

Transition Plan

Must be drawn up with the young person and their family.

Names and Pronouns

Names are intensely personal, and can be really important in terms of how we relate to and speak about each other

Informing Others

Informing classmates
Informing other parents

Practicalities

Uniforms
Bathrooms and changing rooms
PE and swimming
Future check ins

Names and Pronouns

Names

Some people choose a new name to reflect their gender identity
It can be common for younger children to try out a few different names – all part of the process

Pronouns

he/she/they
singular they!

Making Mistakes

Correct yourself, apologise, and move on.
Practice using the name/pronoun – out loud!

Consult with the child and family.
Sometimes the young person wants to be there for the conversation, sometimes they do not.

- Consider introducing theme with a book
- Use age-appropriate language, don't get caught in terminology
- Keep it simple
- Base conversations around feelings, respecting one another

- Leave space for children to ask questions
- Model correct use of name and pronouns once these have been introduced

Informing other students

Consult with the child and family.

Do they need to know in advance? Will informing the other parents increase the social acceptance of the child?

For younger class groups, it can be helpful if parents are able to supplement the conversation at home.

It can also be an idea to let the parents know that this conversation will be happening but not specifying a date.

You will know best how to approach the parents in the school community.

Informing other parents?

Practicalities

Uniforms

What uniform options do you have?
Tracksuit options?

Sports Teams

Self-identify best team for them
Mixed gender teams?

Bathrooms

What bathroom options do you currently have?
We recommend gender-neutral and gendered bathrooms
Students entitled to use bathroom that best fits them

Swimming

Single-stall changing space?
Same as bathrooms, students should be supported in using the best changing spaces for them
Poncho towel to protect their privacy

Bullying

Department of Education Circular 045/2013

Primary schools are mandated to include transphobia in anti-bullying policies
This covers all schools, regardless of patronage

Transphobic bullying can include:

Repeated use of wrong name or pronouns
Inappropriate questions about bodies, 'real' names
Derogatory language and name-calling
Social isolation
Physical violence

Belong To School Climate Survey – Secondary School

Widespread bullying and isolation in secondary schools
Solutions:
- Anti-Bullying Policy and Procedures
- Staff training and CPD – INTO CPD on LGBT+ Inclusive Schools
- Curriculum and teaching materials
- LGBTQ+ Safe Space

Teaching Resources

Educational Resources

- Different Families, Same Love, INTO – all grades
- 'All Together Now', Collins – 5th and 6th class
- 'Unveiling Our Past', INTO – 5th and 6th class
- 'Gender Equality Matters', DCU – 5th and 6th class

Books

Infants
- Sparkle Boy, Leslea Newman
- A Fox Called Herbert, Margaret Sturton
- Introducing Teddy, Jessica Walton
- Red: A Crayon's Story, Michael Hall

3rd/4th Class
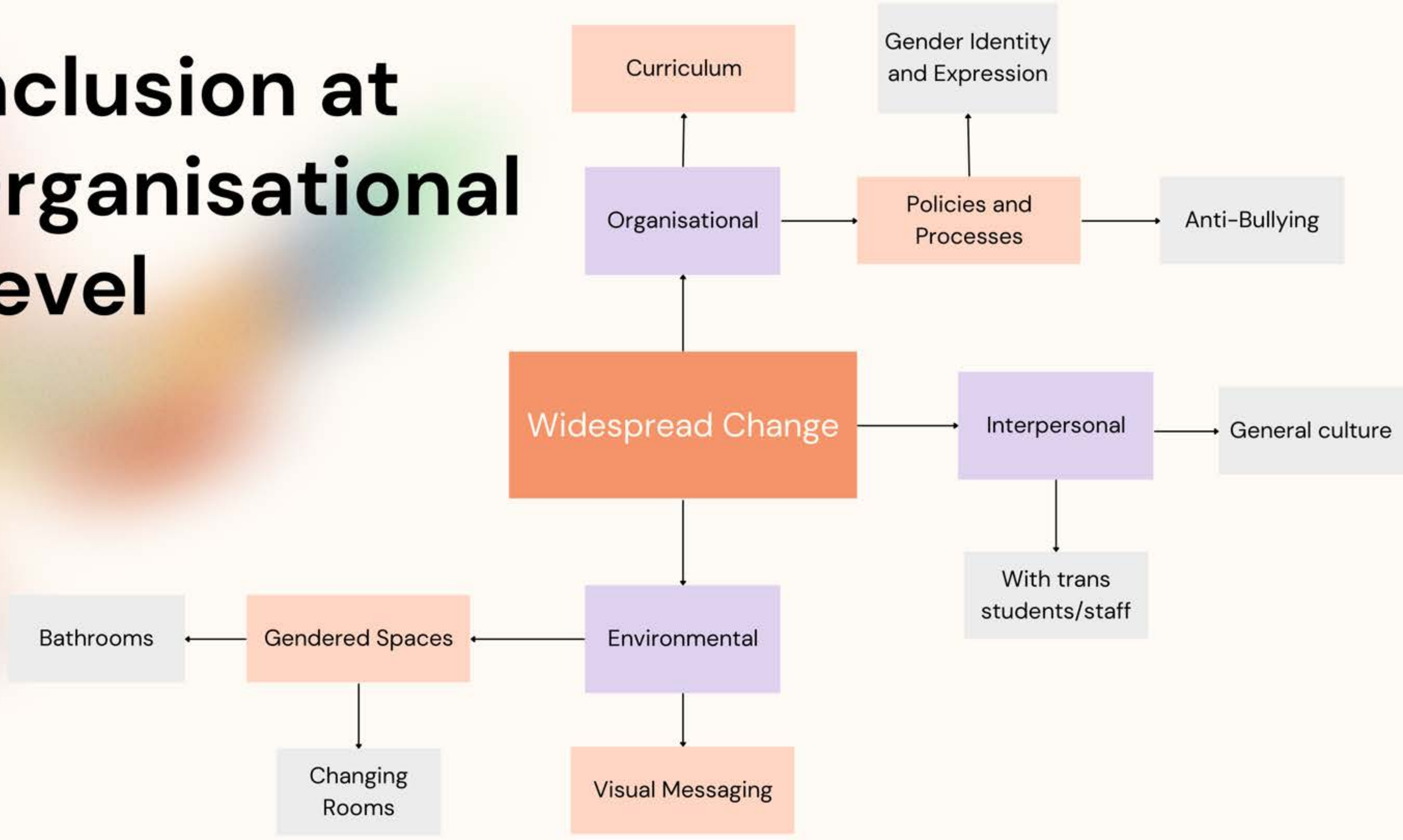- Harriet vs the Galaxy, Samantha Baines

1st/2nd Class
- Alien Nation, Matty Donaldson
- My Shadow is Pink, Scott Stuart
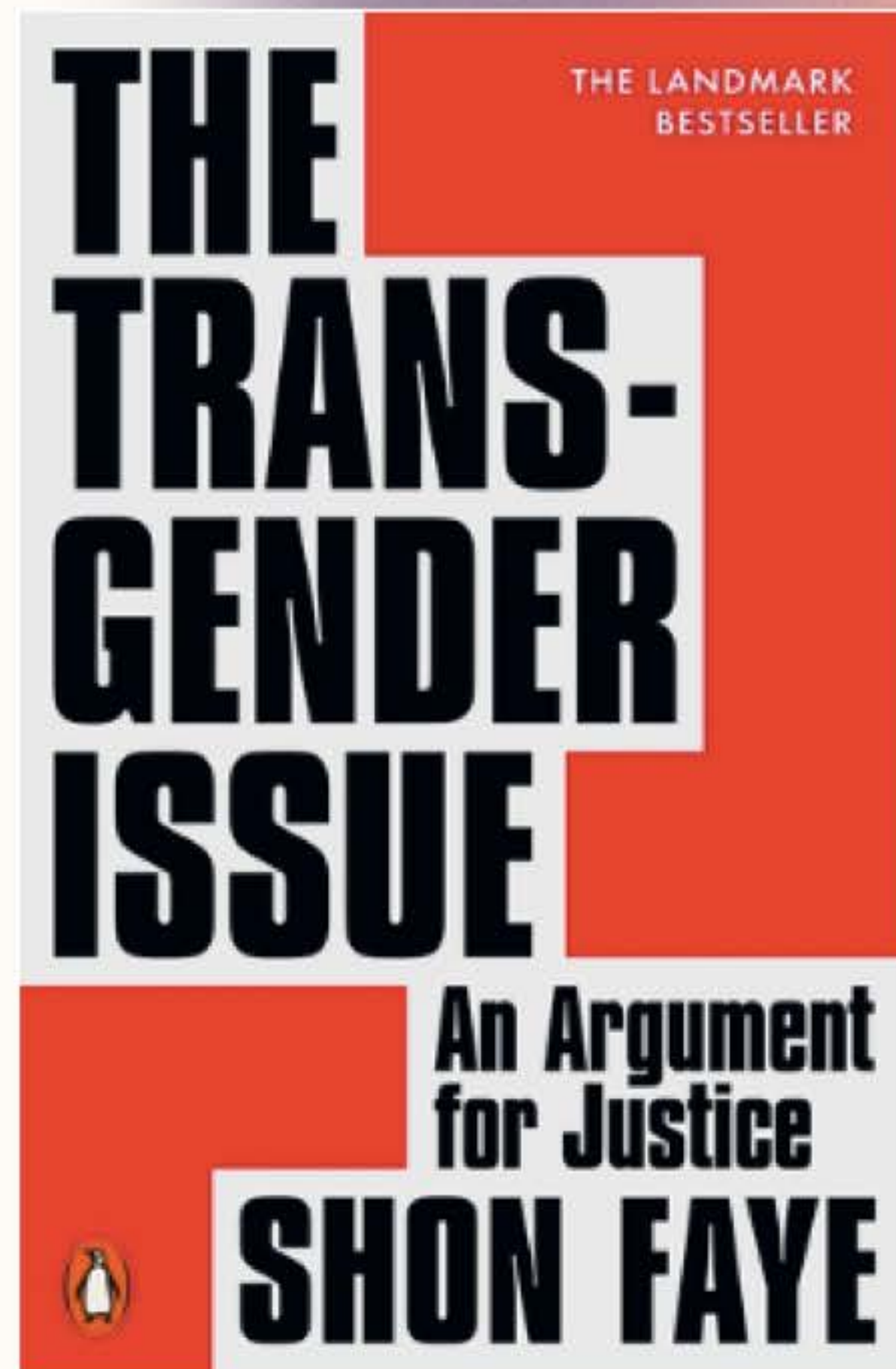- I am Jazz, Jessica Herthel
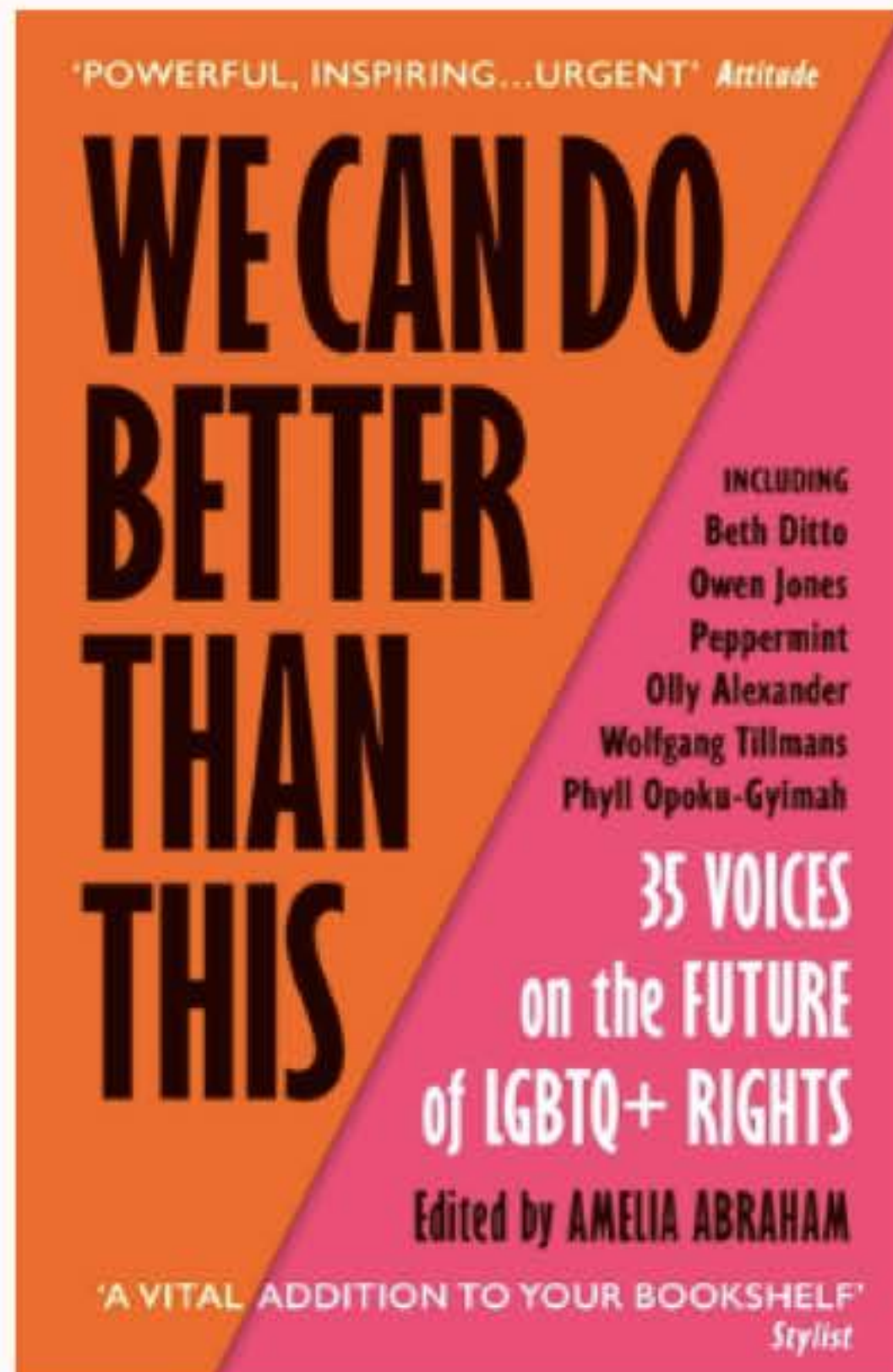- 10,000 Dresses, Marcus Ewert

5th/6th Class
- Gracefully Grayson, Ami Polonsky
- The Other Boy, MG Hennessey

Inclusion at Organisational Level

Resources

DISCLOSURE

'POWERFUL, INSPIRING...URGENT' *Attitude*

WE CAN DO BETTER THAN THIS

INCLUDING
Beth Ditto
Owen Jones
Peppermint
Olly Alexander
Wolfgang Tillmans
Phyll Opoku-Gyimah

35 VOICES on the **FUTURE** of **LGBTQ+ RIGHTS**

Edited by **AMELIA ABRAHAM**

'A VITAL ADDITION TO YOUR BOOKSHELF'
Stylist

THE LANDMARK BESTSELLER

THE TRANS-GENDER ISSUE

An Argument for Justice

SHON FAYE

Thank You

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Transgender
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