

Rachel Rooney

Children's poet and author

The cancellation

"I have always worked with children with special needs. It is ingrained in me that you don't tell a child they are wrong in any way."



Rachel Rooney was originally a special needs teacher, later moving across to poetry and children's literature. She began to express concerns about gender-identity ideology after working on a poetry project with a group of autistic teenage girls, during which she witnessed an overlap between gender distress and autism.

Rooney began to speak at events and online about her concerns. People targeted her and defamed her on social media as a result. In 2020, her book *My Body is Me!* was published. The book uses poetry to help young children to accept themselves and their bodies. Attacks against her intensified. She was labelled hateful and transphobic, and attempts were made to prevent her being able to continue working in schools. Her publisher informed her that some bookshops were refusing to stock her other books. Rooney's own publisher stopped tagging her in book-related publicity, and its publicist blocked her. Repeated appeals to the Society of Authors to help were rebuffed.

"I wrote to ask [the Society of Authors] to cease and desist, yet they continued. They framed the smear campaign as author disputes, but it mainly happened behind a block, so I had no right to reply."

The effect

Two books released by Rooney in 2021 received little publicity. Writing later in what she termed her exit interview from publishing, Rooney said: "People often talk of cancel culture, but there is a more insidious technique at play, one that's harder to prove but palpable to the receiver, that of Ghosting Culture. It's when your book doesn't get on reading lists or recommendations, it's when it doesn't get reviewed, it's when you are not invited on a panel to discuss it. It's where organisations you've worked with and sometimes even long-time friends, avoid liking or retweeting publicity about it."

Rooney does not write any more. She started writing to get her through a difficult period. "The thing that I turned to to lift me out of a terrible situation has put me back into it," she says. She sees the culture improving in children's publishing, but the negative effects are long-lasting.

"Publishing used to be a joyful, exciting, creative place to be."