

Joint briefing for members of the Education and Skills Committee on
Personal Social Education – Wednesday 8th March 2017

Key points

- **High quality, age appropriate PSE is critical to the prevention of abuse and the supporting of good mental health and wellbeing.**
- **It is vital that improved PSE is supported by a whole-school approach.**
- **National leadership is necessary to ensure consistency and support in schools, particularly in relation to RSHPE guidance.**
- **There should be ongoing scrutiny of PSE in relation to positive outcomes for children and young people.**
- **A further conversation is needed around the mandatory nature of PSE.**

This month, the Westminster House of Commons voted for legislation which would ratify the Istanbul Convention; if successful this will place the convention on a statutory footing. One of the practical responses that this Convention ensures is education in schools on topics such as violence against women and girls, equality between men and women, the right to personal integrity, and healthy relationships. The Westminster Government have also recently committed to making Sex and Relationship Education compulsory in all schools in England. ¹

With this timely reminder, we would like to draw the Committee's attention to the role of PSE in preventing abuse and exploitation and promoting healthy relationships and good mental health.

As mentioned by some Committee Members during the roundtable discussion, the issues and subject areas which could potentially fall under the umbrella of PSE are numerous. As organisations working with children and young people we believe good PSE is critical to the **preventative agenda**. It can teach young people about healthy relationships, abusive behaviour, online safety and staying safe. It helps them develop their understanding of what is right and wrong and the skills to ask for help.

PSE also has a role to play in ensuring children are able to talk about/get advice on their mental health, as well as helping to increase the emotional resilience of children

¹ BBC (1 March 2017) *Sex education to be compulsory in England's schools*
(Available online)

and young people who often find it difficult to label and regulate their feelings and can often lack coping mechanisms and emotional literacy.

- **High-quality, age-appropriate PSE is critical to the prevention of abuse and the supporting of good mental health and wellbeing;** all children have right to receive high-quality, age-appropriate and consistent education about healthy relationships which will help keep them safe and well.
- **It is vital that improved PSE is delivered not just in classrooms, but is supported by a whole-school approach** which creates safe and inclusive environments for children. PSE lessons do not exist in isolation from the rest of schooling – a school may be able to provide outstanding PSE lessons around sexting and online behaviour, but also needs to have clear policies to respond to individual incidents effectively. PSE should play a role in making sure that schools adopt a 'no wrong door approach' to when children need advice on mental health. We would be interested in the national picture of how provision in PSE lessons is supported by wider school structures and policies.
- **We believe national leadership is necessary to ensure consistency and support in schools,** particularly in relation to the specific Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education (RSHPE) guidance ² within PSE. There continue to be concerns about the consistency of provision of high quality, age appropriate RSHPE across Scotland – for example whether provision covers primary and secondary levels, reaches children disengaged from schooling, and covers the range of relevant topics. Worryingly, recent research by the TIE campaign highlighted that only 9% of teachers who responded felt the RSHPE guidance was extensive enough, 34% hadn't read it and 21% didn't know what it was. ³
- **A further conversation is needed around the mandatory nature of PSE.** There is a difference between making PSE mandatory or compulsory and making PSE prescriptive. How can we ensure its importance is emphasised and it is given parity of esteem with other subject areas?

Tam Baillie, Children and Young People's Commissioner for Scotland, in his evidence to the Committee stated that:

"Curricular flexibility should not mean children miss out on knowledge and skills so essential to realising their rights. PSE, and in particular RSHP, is the one area of curriculum where more explicit guidance of what should be covered is required and I would encourage the development of this"

- **We would also highlight to the Committee the importance of ongoing scrutiny and inspection** of what we're achieving through PSE, and whether this is currently being achieved or worked towards through the wellbeing strand of the National Improvement Framework.

Contact:

² <http://www.gov.scot/Resource/0046/00465948.pdf>

³ <http://www.tiecampaign.co.uk/research>

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