

PSE - Focus groups discussions

Three of the six focus groups held by the Committee in late January / early February included a discussion on PSE. All comments below are anonymised and only the comments on PSE are included. Notes relating to Additional Support Needs and Curriculum for Excellence will be circulated for the relevant Committee meetings on 1st and 8th March.

Discussion with PGDE students from the University of Glasgow – 26 January 2017

9 trainee teachers attended. They were attending Parliament as part of a day course run by the Parliament's Education Centre. Most were modern studies teachers. They had all completed one school placement and had started, or were about to start, their second.

Ross Greer MSP and Daniel Johnson MSP facilitated the discussion.

The TIE / Stonewall school wide initiative was described by one attendee as effective, but freeing up time for a few teachers to receive this training (to be shared with other teachers teaching PSE across the school) was challenging given the number of CfE changes taking place at present.

The group as a whole's contributions suggested that PSE provision was variable between the different schools they had been placed in. One teacher suggested they had not received any support, they were just told they were teaching it. Another suggested the time allocated was limited to 10-15 minutes after registration so there was no scope for guest speakers - it relied entirely on one teacher's input and sometimes leaflets.

Discussion with teachers at Dalkeith High School – 8th February 2017

The discussion involved 5 teachers from Dalkeith High School and 3 from St David's High School. The teachers were from a variety of disciplines and this included Dalkeith High School's PSE specialist.

James Dornan MSP (Convener), Ross Greer MSP and Ross Thomson MSP facilitated the discussion.

Dalkeith High consulted S1-S6 pupils when it recently revisited its PSE curriculum. Gaps identified through this work included some additional training of staff on some issues, and a need to increase further the focus on mental health and domestic abuse issues. A lack of time will, it was suggested, always be an issue as there is a lot of material young people want to go through under 'PSE'. Positive feedback from students included they liked having agencies in to advise them on different issues, including employers/colleges on pathways into careers.

A St David's High School teacher mentioned there is a difference in approach between denominational and non-denominational schools'. They suggested there were issues with social education that have not been entirely addressed in teaching but that some programmes, such as some on sexual health, were a strength.

A Dalkeith High teacher suggested it is well acknowledged now that shock tactics do not work in relation to drugs and alcohol and it was important to keep teaching up to date, for example reflecting recent trends in psychoactive drugs. The police provide stats on percentages of children locally involved in sexual activity or drug taking to schools to ensure schools can respond to arising issues. When asked Dalkeith High teachers suggested that responding flexibly, including changing the lesson planning at short notice to reflect these emerging issues, was not a problem.

When asked about transgender children and how they are supported, and LGBT issues, Dalkeith High teachers confirmed Stonewall comes in to offer support and there is also a LGBT support group.

A teacher who stated they had been in St David's for a short period and so spoke from broader experience across other schools said they did not agree with the TIE perspective on schools' progress with LGBT. The teacher said they took pride in the way young people in school accept transgender people. The teacher suggested the improvement in acceptance and knowledge and awareness since they were at school was "like night and day".

Another teacher from St David's said that there were open conversations about sexuality and the importance of including others whatever their differences, and that these discussions took place during religious education lessons.

Discussion with students at Dalkeith High School – 8th February 2017

5 students from S3 to S6 in Dalkeith High took part in the discussion, this was in place of attending their weekly health and wellbeing session. Dalkeith High teacher also attended.

James Dornan MSP (Convener), Ross Greer MSP and Ross Thomson MSP facilitated the discussion.

One student suggested since S3 up through the senior phase PSE sessions have covered what they need to be doing to satisfy UCAS / colleges / employers aside from traditional qualifications (ie extra-curricular activities). PSE sessions therefore have a careers focus.

Another suggested since it is not just academic you see your teacher as more of a person but sometimes these teachers were stretched between lots of pupils as you get one guidance teacher for a whole year. But teachers did make themselves available outside PSE sessions so you could drop into their office or make an appointment if it wasn't urgent. House teachers were available if guidance teachers were not around.

Corridor monitors are pupils who report back if there is bullying in corridors and there are anti-bullying ambassadors too.

When asked if "sex ed" was inclusive of all young people all the students agreed that it was. One pupil said if people are not comfortable with the idea of 'coming out' then character building sessions in PSE helps them. But they thought school staff, and pupils, would be supportive and that generally society has moved forward.

When asked what they would change one student said that the time could be used better as a lot of the time is based on subjects they are already studying - more life skills would be good. When asked about financial planning they said they didn't get anything on that and there was lots of support for getting sessions on that subject. Also there had not been any discussions on voting during PSE, and that would be of interest, including learning how to register to vote.