

Written evidence submitted by the Sex Education Forum

Summary

The Children's Commissioner wants to see PSHE in school on a statutory basis. This would contribute to a major reduction in children being harmed and we fully support the high priority that is given to this in 'Ambitious for Children' and call on the Government to respond.

1. Currently the provision of sex and relationships education (SRE) in schools is unacceptably patchy and inconsistent. Every child and young person has a right to comprehensive SRE and we (as adults) have a duty to ensure this.
2. Schools providing inadequate SRE are failing to address contemporary issues such as pornography and sexual exploitation. Ofsted consulted pupils for their PSHE report 'Not yet good enough' (2013) and consequently recommended that schools address issues such as pornography and domestic violence within SRE.
3. Ofsted are also concerned that some primary schools are failing to teach the basic body science that is necessary to underpin further learning about bodily privacy and safety. They found: "*younger pupils had not always learnt the correct names for sexual body parts*" and see this as a safeguarding failure because it leaves children without the language skills to understand their bodies and which parts are private, to know what is acceptable / unacceptable touching and behavior and to say what has happened to them (2013).
4. Teachers need training to be able to teach good quality SRE: in our survey of 208 teachers of SRE in England, 7 out of 10 (68%) said they feel they need training to be able to teach good quality SRE (Sex Education Forum, 2014). Statutory status would allow SRE and PSHE to be treated the same as other subjects – with teachers getting the training they need and enough time being allocated in the time-table for this vital subject.
5. From a public health perspective evidence shows that SRE is effective in reducing likelihood of teenage pregnancy, increasing the age at which young people first have sex, increasing use of contraception, reducing age-differential between young people and sexual partners and reducing incidents of unwanted first sex. See 'SRE – the evidence' (Sex Education Forum, 2015).
6. The Children's Commissioner reports in 'Ambitious for Children' that 'young people who had been sexually exploited told us they would have benefited from

good relationships and sex education in school'. This is supported by the evidence cited above.

7. The recent recommendation made by the Education Select Committee in 'Life Lessons' (2015) that SRE and PSHE be made statutory has not been heeded by the Government.
8. Recent government initiatives have been inadequate because they have failed to address the inconsistency in the provision of SRE in schools. SRE is every child's right.
9. Statutory SRE is needed because:
 - The existing legislation refers to sex education, not SRE
 - The legislation is not universal for state-funded schools
 - The programme of study for science in the National Curriculum includes some sex education but only applies to maintained schools
 - There is no legislation that applies to the 'R' in SRE - relationships education; what this should cover is not defined in any up-to-date document
 - There is no detail in legislation about what should be taught in relation to HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections and evidence shows that some pupils learn nothing about HIV in schools (Sex Education Forum 2011)
 - The statutory duty to promote pupil wellbeing (Children Act 2004) is not sufficiently defined so fails to ensure curriculum provision on safeguarding and health
10. Statutory SRE as part of PSHE needs to apply to all schools – including primary and secondary schools, academies, free schools and maintained schools. The current legislation relating to sex education is very confusing and leaves primary schools with the option not to teach a programme of SRE. New legislation needs to provide a clear definition of SRE which includes learning about consent and relationships, sexual and reproductive health.
11. The Government guidance on SRE should also be updated to provide clarity and leadership to schools.

References

Department for Education (2014) Keeping children safe in education.
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/keeping-children-safe-in-education>

Ofsted (2013) 'Not yet good enough; personal, social, health and economic education in schools, Ofsted, May 2013 <http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/resources/not-yet-good-enough-personal-social-health-and-economic-education-schools>.

Sex Education Forum (2014) 'Your experiences of teaching SRE' –survey of 208 teachers of SRE in England. The survey was carried out between Feb 28 and 31 May 2014.

Sex Education Forum (2015) SRE – the evidence
<http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/media/28306/SRE-the-evidence-March-2015.pdf>

About the Sex Education Forum

The Sex Education Forum, hosted by the National Children's Bureau, is the national authority on sex and relationships education (SRE). It is a collaboration of national organisations and practitioners with representatives from health, education, faith, disability and children's organisations, working together to ensure children and young people's right to good quality SRE.

October 2015