



Society for the Protection of Unborn Children

Briefing notes on responding to the Education Select Committee inquiry into PSHE and sex education

How to make a submission to the Education Select Committee inquiry into PSHE education and sex education

SPUC Safe at School is urging as many concerned people as possible to respond to this new inquiry from the Education Select Committee. The push for making sex education a compulsory subject is growing stronger. This inquiry will be used by those who want all children to learn about sex in the classroom. Parents will lose the power to protect their children.

You can only make a submission to this consultation online. There is no provision for sending in submissions on paper to the select committee, but anyone with no email wishing to submit a handwritten or typed submission can post their submission to SPUC, 3 Whitacre Mews, Stannary Street, London SE11 2AB, and we will email it. Anyone wanting paper copies of the documents linked to in this briefing paper can request them by calling SPUC Safe at School on: 020 8407 3463.

For those able to make an online submission, this briefing document is available on the SPUC website – www.spuc.org.uk

This is the link to the Education Select Committee inquiry:

<http://www.parliament.uk/business/committees/committees-a-z/commons-select/education-committee/news/pshe-and-sre-tor/>

The inquiry is asking for a response to five points. You will find notes to help you respond to those points in this briefing paper.

Format of submissions The select committee asks for submissions to be emailed as an attachment. The upper limit is 3,000 words, about six pages of A4. It is not necessary to make a long submission. The select committee would like you to number your paragraphs and also that you give a summary of your responses at the beginning of your submission. A summary is really only necessary if you make a long submission.

Deadline for submissions The deadline for making submissions is 12pm Friday 6 June 2014. Paper submission must be sent to SPUC by Tuesday 3 June 2014.

Background notes

What is PSHE?

PSHE stands for personal, social, health and economic education. This subject covers drug education, financial education, sex and relationship education (SRE) and the importance of physical activity and diet for a healthy lifestyle. It is not a compulsory subject, but most primary and secondary schools teach some or all of the topics in PSHE.

The campaign to make PSHE compulsory

There is a loud campaign to make PSHE education a compulsory subject in schools, by organisations such as the Sex Education Forum, Brook and the PSHE Association, all of which support the provision of contraceptives and abortion for young people without parental knowledge or consent.

We should note that although the coalition government has stated that it will not make PSHE a compulsory subject, there are indications that whatever government is elected in May 2015, efforts will be intensified in making PSHE and sex and relationships education (SRE) compulsory. Compulsory sex education means taking away the rights of parents to influence what is taught in schools and their right to withdraw their children from sex education classes.

We also need to note that PSHE was not included as a statutory subject in the new National Curriculum published in July 2013, due to take effect in September 2014.

However, if we look at the government guidance on PSHE, published in 2013, we see clearly that, although PSHE is not a compulsory subject, the Department for Education regards it as “important and necessary” and states that schools “should” teach it. It is also clear that the department thinks that teachers “are best placed to understand the needs of their pupils”. There is no reference to parents. You can see the guidance here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-social-health-and-economic-education-pshe/personal-social-health-and-economic-pshe-education>

Yet another consultation

A consultation on PSHE was carried out last year by the Department for Education and a report published in March 2013. The report can be seen here: <http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/media/15905/review-of-pshe.pdf>

Parents topped the list of those who responded to that consultation and the report noted that:

“Many respondents believed that parents had the principal responsibility for PSHE education ... health, lifestyle, social and emotional behaviour and welfare were primarily the responsibility of parents and carers.”

Asked to give a general view on PSHE a majority of respondents

“were of the opinion that SRE was a particularly sensitive subject and it was essential that schools should not be allowed to force the teaching of this on pupils without proper consideration for the needs of the individual child, nor without proper consultation with the parents of the children involved. Respondents strongly supported maintaining section 403 of the Education Act, which allows parents to withdraw their child wholly or partly from SRE.”

The strong message from the March 2013 report is that parents are concerned about PSHE and sex education and they do not favour making it compulsory. This may be why yet another consultation is being conducted so soon, in an attempt to get a different response.

We must make sure that the government gets another strong message that parents must retain the right to protect their children from unacceptable sex and relationship education.

The current inquiry

There is a real danger that the outcome of the consultation will be a recommendation that PSHE/SRE should be made compulsory. In order to avert this danger, there needs to be a strong response from individuals and organisations saying “no” to compulsory PSHE and sex education.

The consultation is asking for a response on five points. We give some suggestions as to the key points to make. Please use your own words and draw on your own personal or professional experiences.

It is important to note that the drive to make PSHE compulsory is because sex and relationship education (SRE) is part of PSHE. PSHE is a Trojan horse. You need only refer to SRE in your submission.

Notes to help you respond to the Education Select Committee Consultation

Point 1: Whether PSHE ought to be statutory, either as part of the National Curriculum or through some other means of entitlement.

The main point to make here is that PSHE and SRE should not be made compulsory at all – either by making it a National Curriculum subject nor by any other provision.

Sex education must remain a non-compulsory subject because keeping it non-compulsory is a:

- recognition that parents are the primary educators of their children in sexual matters, not the school or the state
- barrier to further state interference with our children
- restraint on schools. This means that schools have to listen to parents. Some schools have modified their delivery of sex education in response to parents' concerns.

In addition, where parents are aware of their right to withdraw their children from unacceptable sex education, they do exercise their right.

Please give a strong response to this point in your own words.

Background information: The current status of SRE:

- maintained primary schools have a legal obligation to have a policy on SRE, but they are not legally obliged to teach it. Where a primary school does teach SRE, parents can withdraw their children.
- there is no statutory requirement for primary schools to teach children about sex in science lessons which are part of the national curriculum and from which parents cannot withdraw their children.
- academies do not have to follow the National Curriculum and are not obliged to teach SRE, but where SRE is taught they are obliged to have regard for the government's guidelines on teaching SRE.
- all maintained secondary schools (other than Academies) must teach the biology of human reproduction, as set out in the National Curriculum. This includes education about HIV and AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases, as well as human growth and reproduction. Typically this is covered in the biology syllabus.
- SRE taught in secondary schools outside biology lessons as part of PSHE is not compulsory and parents can withdraw their children.

- SRE in independent schools is not subject to statutory requirements.

Point 2: Whether the current accountability system is sufficient to ensure that schools focus on PSHE.

It is unclear what is meant by the “current accountability system”. There is no specific mention of accountability in the government guidance on PSHE (see above).

Parents have the primary responsibility for teaching their own children about the dangers of drugs, taking exercise and eating healthy food and also for teaching their children about puberty and sexual matters. Parents do this in the normal course of family life and a good PSHE programme should support parents.

Making schools strictly accountable for the topics covered in PSHE means that parents may no longer see themselves as accountable for their children’s social capacities such as resisting drugs, handling money etc.

In addition, many of the topics covered in PSHE, in particular SRE, are not morally neutral. Parents must be able to teach their own children about these sensitive issues in line with their own values and beliefs, and not be undermined by the school.

Therefore, schools should be accountable principally to parents in the delivery of PSHE.

We should note that where schools teach SRE they are legally obliged to follow government guidelines. In these guidelines there are over 90 references which stress the importance of parents. For example, section 5.6 states:

“Schools should always work in partnership with parents, consulting them regularly on the content of sex and relationship education programmes. Reflection around parents’ own experiences of sex education can often lead to a productive discussion in which teachers and parents can start planning sex and relationship education provision for their children. Parents need to know that the school’s sex and relationship education programme will complement and support their role as parents and that they can be actively involved in the determination of the school’s policy.”

You can see the guidelines here:

<http://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20130401151715/https://www.education.gov.uk/publications/eOrderingDownload/DfES-0116-2000%20SRE.pdf>

The key point to make here is that schools must be accountable to parents.

Point 3: The overall provision of Sex and Relationships Education in schools and the quality of its teaching, including in primary schools and academies.

Much of the provision of SRE in schools is unsatisfactory largely because of the explicit nature of the materials used to teach children and teenagers.

SPUC Safe at School has campaigned against the use of these materials, particularly in primary schools. One of the most widely used teaching resources for primary schools is called “Living and Growing” published by Channel 4. This programme comprises three workbooks and nine, 15-minute films. The cartoon films in this teaching resource include a couple having sexual intercourse, a boy ejaculating and references to masturbation.

You can see SPUC’s reviews of “Living and Growing” at : <https://www.spuc.org.uk/campaigns/safeatschool/>

To get an idea of the nature of this material please see this BBC interview:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PMEjBVDB0BY>

“Living and Growing” is only one in a range of sex education teaching resources, but many contain equally graphic depictions of sexual activity.

Parents and grandparents can respond with reference to the materials used by their own children’s/ grandchildren’s schools.

The following points are about the difficulties many parents have expressed about the way in which their children’s schools handle SRE.

- Some schools fail to make full disclosure to parents of all the teaching materials used in PSHE and SRE.
- Schools do not write to parents with enough notice about SRE lessons. Often the letters are misleading. Parents do not expect that their children will be shown images of sexual intercourse after receiving a letter stating the lesson will be about puberty.
- The timing of information meetings about SRE is often inconvenient for parents
- Schools do not make it sufficiently clear to parents that they may withdraw their children from these lessons, nor do schools make it clear what provision is made for children who are withdrawn e.g. do the children join another class, work in the library etc?
- Parents and children are made to feel awkward about withdrawing their children.

In order to address the inadequacy and unacceptability of many teaching resources for sex education, the

government should making funding available to organisations, both religious and non-religious, to produce materials which support parents and do not expose children and teenagers to explicit sexual images and messages.

Point 4: Whether recent Government steps to supplement the guidance on teaching about sex and relationships, including consent, abuse between teenagers and cyber-bullying, are adequate.

This point refers to a recent document entitled “Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) for the 21st Century - Supplementary advice to the Sex and Relationship Education Guidance DfEE (0116/2000)”. This has been produced by the PSHE Association, Brook and the Sex Education Forum.

This is not official advice from the Department for Education and does not supersede the current guidelines. However, it has been promoted by the government.

You can see the supplementary advice document here:

http://www.brook.org.uk/images/brook/professionals/documents/page_content/SRE/SRE_Supplementary_Advice_2014.pdf

You can see the SPUC Safe at School commentary by going to http://www.spuc.org.uk/campaigns/safeatschool/comment_on_brook_sre_advice

Points made by SPUC Safe at School about this advice document include:

- There is no suggestion that parents should be consulted. Instead schools are advised to ask children and teenagers what they would like to be taught.
- SRE should be taught by people who are “trained” to talk about “healthy and unhealthy relationships, equality, pleasure, respect, abuse, sexuality, gender identity, sex and consent.”
- The document argues that sex education for children should “treat sex as a normal and pleasurable fact of life”. Sex is “normal and pleasurable” for married adults but not for children.
- Gender and violence are key themes in this advice document, which encourages children and teenagers to think of society as “a pernicious culture that reinforces stereotypes and gendered expectations”.

You may also like to read a response to the advice document from Norman Wells of the Family Education Trust who comments on the teaching of pornography: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/education/educationopinion/10689770/Sex-education-is-Planet-Porn-really-appropriate.html>

Point 5: How the effectiveness of SRE should be measured

It is surprising that the inquiry is only looking for how SRE should be measured and not any other part of PSHE. This tends to support the view that the real interest is in sex education and that there is not the same interest in healthy eating, regular exercise and so on.

One approach to measuring the effectiveness of SRE would be to focus on parents. For example, parents could be asked about whether the school explained fully the SRE programme, whether they were involved at any stage of the planning and delivery of SRE. Parents could be given the opportunity to express confidentially their view of the materials used to teach their children and what they feel would most help their children. Parents should be asked about the way their children and teenagers behave following SRE lessons.

Schools could be asked how many children and teenagers are withdrawn from classes and for their observations of behaviour following sex education classes, particularly among small children.

Background information:

A major argument in favour of focusing on parents in assessing the effectiveness of SRE, is that it is very difficult to establish a causal link between SRE and teenagers changing their behaviour. Teenagers who are taught about how to use contraceptives and where to get them, may be able to answer questions correctly about these points, but whether their behaviour changes as a result is another matter. Britain still has the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe and sexually-transmitted infections are increasing in young people.

After more than thirty years of classroom sex education aimed at teaching primary school children about sex and teaching teenagers how to avoid pregnancy, successive governments are reluctant to address the question ‘is it making any difference?’ Still less are they willing to change radically the approach to sex education.

13th May 2014



Society for the Protection of Unborn Children
3 Whitacre Mews, Stannary Street, London, SE11 4AB
Telephone: (020) 7091 7091 Web: www.spuc.org.uk
Email: information@spuc.org.uk