

Changes to the teaching of Sex and Relationship Education and Personal, Social and Health Education

Response of the Association of School and College Leaders

1 The Association of School and College Leaders (ASCL) represents nearly 19,000 education system leaders, heads, principals, deputies, vice-principals, assistant heads, business managers and other senior staff of state-funded and independent schools and colleges throughout the UK. ASCL members are responsible for the education of more than four million young people in more than 90 per cent of the secondary and tertiary phases, and in an increasing proportion of the primary phase. This places the association in a strong position to consider this issue from the viewpoint of the leaders of schools and colleges of all types.

2 ASCL welcomes the opportunity to respond on this important issue.

Executive summary

3 ASCL supports the provisions in the Children and Social Work Act 2017 to make the new subjects of Relationships Education (RE) for primary age pupils and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) for secondary age students mandatory. We agree that RSE/RE should be an identifiable part of a Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) curriculum, with planned, timetabled lessons across all the Key Stages.

4 We broadly welcome the power given to the Secretary of State by the Act to make PSHE, or elements of it, mandatory. The association's position is that PSHE, is an important and essential part of all pupils' education. Although we believe that PSHE should be a statutory part of children's learning we are equally clear that there should not be any national prescription in terms of content.

5 To deliver the best possible outcomes for young people schools need to have the flexibility to innovate; to design and deliver a high-quality PSHE and RSE/RE curriculum which meets the needs of all their pupils. It would therefore not be helpful for government to provide standardised frameworks or programmes of study.

6 ASCL is keen to work with the government to agree principles for how RSE/RE and PSHE are to be delivered in schools and to establish what should constitute a basic pupil entitlement at each age and stage of a child's education.

7 To bring about the desired outcome of every child receiving high quality RSE/RE and PSHE education it will be essential that RSE/RE and PSHE are integrated parts of a school's curriculum.

8 The RSE/RE and PSHE curriculum has both pedagogies and content so additional funding will be required to train teachers to teach these programmes with confidence. For those charged with leading RSE/RE and PSHE, training will need to include how to design curricula which work best in the context of their school and community and can be tailored to meet new and emerging challenges.

- 9 The effective provision and delivery of PSHE/RSE will also require a range of high quality evidence based resources with supportive guidance so that teachers can select the most appropriate and relevant materials to meet the needs of their pupils. The development and curating of these materials will also require additional funding.
- 10 As indicated above, we consider it essential that all guidance and resources are evidence based. For example we note that there is a risk of contagion if self-harm and suicide are taught as part of a mental health course. Schools and colleges need to be provided with relevant research to support their planning and delivery.
- 11 ASCL members do not deem it necessary to have a formal assessment of the delivery of PSHE/RSE as each schools will need to tailor their programme to suit their context. However as part of an effective pedagogical approach, teachers will want to gauge the extent to which pupils have understood and engaged with the material presented.
- 12 We very much welcomed the government's guidance on sexual violence and sexual harassment between young people in schools and colleges, which we worked on closely with the DfE. We are aware of the importance of RSE and RE alongside this guidance and the need for all schools to create a sustainable properly embedded 'whole school approach' to ending sexual harassment and sexual abuse.
- 13 High quality RSE/RE must give children and young people the language, knowledge and skills to identify abusive behaviour as well as supporting them to challenge and reject attitudes and beliefs which support or condone abuse. Highly effective RSE/RE programmes will help create safe school environments where children and young people can disclose any abuse they may have suffered or witnessed.
- 14 As we believe that all children and young people have an entitlement to receive high quality RSE/RE ASCL does not support the right of parental withdrawal for RSE in secondary schools and we are fully supportive of the proposal that there will be no parental right to withdraw from RE in primary schools.
- 15 With regard to teaching about Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) we note that for some at risk groups of children the peak age for FGM is while they are still at primary school. We understand the statutory duties on schools and colleges that are set out in Working Together to Safeguard Children and Keeping Children Safe in Education. Primary and secondary schools with children who may be at risk of FGM will need to consider and plan how the teaching about FGM is best delivered within their context.
- 16 The proposals for PSHE/SRE/RE changes have to be seen in the context of significant real terms reductions to school funding over several years. We know that real-terms reductions in school funding since 2015 have led to a big reduction in the number of secondary teachers, teaching assistants and support staff in England¹. Schools have been doing all they can to shield their pupils from the damage caused by £2.8 billion, in real terms, being cut from school budgets since 2015 and this lack of investment is really biting. These cuts have already undeniably affected front-line teaching and schools' delivery of PSHE/RSE/RE will not have been exempt from the effects of financial constraint. As indicated in paragraphs 8 and 9 above, additional funding will be required to deliver high quality ESRE/RE and PSHE.
- 17 We note that there is already some excellent and innovative practice in schools across the country and we would welcome ways of sharing and building on this.

¹ https://www.ascl.org.uk/news-and-views/news_news-detail.schools-forced-to-cut-teachers-and-teaching-assistants-posts-to-make-ends-meet.html

Relationships Education (RE) in primary schools

- 18 We fully support making RE mandatory in primary schools.
- 19 We believe it is essential that the RE curriculum includes teaching primary children about:
- Positive relationships – to include relationships with others and oneself and learning about respect and privacy
 - Consent – to include a thorough exploration of issues of consent broadly through different types of relationships and including appropriate and inappropriate ways of touching and being touched
 - The language, knowledge and skills to identify abusive behaviour
 - Body parts and correctly naming them
 - Internet safety including the risks of accessing online pornography
 - Puberty, see paragraph 20 below
 - Different types of family groupings and marriage, see paragraph 21 below
 - Gender equality, discrimination, sexual violence and harassment
- 20 In the UK an increasing number of girls (and some boys) start puberty in primary school. For girls this can be as early as year 4. However the impact of puberty on individuals is not addressed in the Science National Curriculum. Most primary schools already, rightly in our view, teach about puberty and there is already much excellent practice. We consider teaching about the impact of puberty on individuals should be a statutory requirement for all primary schools as part of the new RE curriculum.
- 21 Within the context of marriage and family relationships we believe that all primary schools should be under a duty to explore different types of relationships and marriage including same sex marriage. We believe that the issue of not recognising one parent families or same sex parents is an equalities issue. Children should be taught about the importance of caring, loving relationships and that these are possible in a wide variety of different family arrangements as this will reflect children's lived experiences and that of their friends.
- 22 Additional funding to enable schools to obtain high quality evidence based resources and training will be required to ensure that teachers are confident to teach the new RE curriculum so that every child receives similar high quality of learning experiences.
- 23 As indicated in paragraph 14 above ASCL members feel strongly that parents should not be given the right to withdraw their children from primary RE and particularly from any lessons which provide the opportunity for children to learn how to keep themselves safe.

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in secondary schools

- 24 ASCL supports the Sex Education Forum (SEF) Principles of Good Quality RSE².
- 25 The 12 principles are that RSE:
- Is an identifiable part of a PSHE education curriculum, with planned, timetabled lessons across all the Key Stages
 - Is taught by staff regularly trained in RSE and PSHE (with expert visitors where appropriate)

² <http://www.sexeducationforum.org.uk/>

- Works in partnership with parents and carers, informing them about what their children will be learning and how they can contribute at home
- Delivers lessons where pupils feel safe, using a variety of teaching approaches to enable them to take part
- Is based on reliable sources of information, including about the law and legal rights, distinguishing between fact and opinion
- Promotes safe, equal, caring and enjoyable relationships and discusses real age-appropriate issues such as friendships, families, consent, relationship abuse, sexual exploitation and safe relationships online
- Gives a positive view of human sexuality, with honest and medically accurate information, so that pupils can learn about their bodies and sexual and reproductive health in ways that are appropriate to their age and maturity
- Gives pupils opportunities to reflect on values and influences that may shape their attitudes to relationships and sex, nurturing respect for different views
- Includes learning about how to get help, treatment and information from a range of reliable sources
- Fosters gender equality and LGBT+ equality and challenges all forms of discrimination in lessons and in every-day school life
- Meets the needs of all pupils with their diverse experiences - including those with special educational needs and disabilities
- Seeks pupils' views about RSE so that teaching can be made relevant to their real lives and assessed and adapted as their needs change

26 As stated in paragraph 14 above we do not support the parent's right to withdraw secondary age children from RSE. It is our strongly held view that schools need absolute clarity on their legal position on this issue against any challenge from parents. This is particularly the case for any content which will support children and young people in keeping themselves safe.

27 With regard to any aspects of child safeguarding, gender equality or harassment it is essential that this aspect of the curriculum is not subject to a parental right to withdraw their child. The association would draw your attention to the fact that Ofsted inspectors currently ask questions about these issues.

28 Alongside the SEF principles outlined above ASCL believes the following should be included in the RSE secondary curriculum:

- Positive relationships – to include relationships with others and oneself and learning about respect and privacy
- Consent – to include a thorough exploration of issues of consent broadly through different types of relationships and including appropriate and inappropriate ways of touching and being touched
- The language, knowledge and skills to identify abusive behaviour
- Internet safety including the risks of accessing online pornography
- Puberty and the impact on the individual
- Different types of family groupings and marriage
- Gender equality, discrimination, sexual violence and harassment
- Abusive relationships and control
- Safe sex and STI's
- Understanding the nature of male and female sexual pleasure
- Same sex physical activity

Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE)

- 29 ASCL believes that PSHE, is an important and essential part of all pupils' education. We believe that PSHE (including RSE/RE) should be statutory but not with any government prescription. To allow schools the flexibility to deliver high-quality PSHE which meets the needs of their pupils and their communities, we consider it unnecessary for the government to provide standardised frameworks or programmes of study.
- 30 The 'whole school culture' should support the development of skills such as resilience, the positive management of emotions, the importance of physical activity, how to keep safe and how to actively manage peer pressure including how not to become involved in gang culture. The development of these skills should be carefully integrated and planned across the whole school curriculum.
- 31 ASCL is very willing to work with government to agree principles for how PSHE should be delivered in schools and to establish what should constitute a basic student entitlement at each age and stage of a child's education. As we indicated earlier, while we do not support standardised programmes of study, we fully support the clear expectation that the PSHE/RSE/RE curriculum must not be a bolt on activity.
- 32 Additional funding to enable schools to access quality assured evidence based resources and training will be required to ensure that teachers are confident to teach the PSHE curriculum so that every child receives a similar high quality learning experience.
- 33 Alongside the topics covered in RE/RSE we believe that the PSHE topics listed below should be an entitlement to all children. It should be up to schools as to how they deliver the detail within topics :
- mental and physical health and wellbeing
 - economic awareness, industrial understanding and enterprise
 - personal finance including debt and gambling
 - environmental sustainability
 - positive participative citizenship
 - politics and democracy
- We also note that many schools will attach careers education, information and guidance into their PSHE programmes.

Responses to your specific questions:

Question 1 Thinking about relationships education in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.

- 34 Paragraph 19 above sets out the key topic and subject areas however it is essential that these are supported by access to high quality training for delivery and a wide range of effective evidence based resources. We note that schools will need funding, support and resources to deliver RE.

Q2 Thinking about relationships and sex education in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.

- 35 Paragraphs 25 and 28 above set out the key topic and subject areas, however it is essential that these are supported by access to high quality training for delivery and a wide range of effective evidence based resources. We note that schools will need funding, support and resources to deliver RSE.

Q3 Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, or as part of the computing curriculum?

- 36 We look to government to consult with experts in this field and then make appropriate decisions based on the evidence presented.

Q4. How should schools effectively consult parents so they can make informed decisions that meet the needs of their child, including on the right to withdraw? For example, how often, on what issues and by what means?

- 37 We believe it is a good approach for schools, as part of their general information, to provide a PSHE/RSE/RE overview on their websites including the rationale for its inclusion in the school's curriculum. The legal position related to the rights of the parent should also be explicit in that statement.

- 38 As stated earlier ASCL does not believe that parents should have the right to withdraw their children from RSE/RE. However should the parental right to withdraw their child be retained the government need to make absolutely clear to schools and to parents the exact nature of this right. It would then be good practice for schools to explain to parents the procedures for a child to be withdrawn.

- 39 It may well be that, for reassurance, parents simply need further details of the RE/SRE programme and, particularly in the early stages of implementation, schools may be able to provide further information directly to parents.

Q5 Thinking about PSHE in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please include your reasons for choosing each subject area or evidence to support your suggestions.

- 40 ASCL believes that all children should have access to a core PSHE programme and this combined with the fact that the needs of individual children will differ make it very difficult to identify three specific subject areas as the most important. We therefore consider that quality teaching in all the areas described in paragraph 33 should be an entitlement for every child although we can see that the balance in a primary school may be more towards the health and well-being, citizenship and environmental aspects. Again, we would note that schools will need support and resources to deliver them.

Q6. Thinking about PSHE in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please also include your reasons for choosing each subject or evidence to support your suggestions.

- 41 ASCL believes that all children should have access to a core PSHE programme and this combined with the fact that the needs of individual children will differ make it very difficult to identify three specific subject areas as the most important. We therefore consider that quality teaching in all the areas described in paragraph 33 should be an entitlement for every child. Again, we would note that schools will need support and resources to deliver them.

Q7. How much flexibility do you think schools should have to meet the needs of individual pupils and to reflect the diversity of local communities and wider society in the content of PSHE lessons in schools?

- 42 To deliver the best possible outcomes for young people schools need to have the flexibility to innovate; to design and deliver a high-quality PSHE and RSE/RE curriculum which meets the needs of all their pupils and the communities in which they live. It would therefore not be helpful for government to provide standardised frameworks or programmes of study.
- 43 We hope that this is of value to your consultation, ASCL is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that it can.

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Association of School and College Leaders
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