



Department for Education

Government Response:
Life lessons: PSHE and
SRE in schools

Presented to Parliament by the Secretary of State for Education
by Command of Her Majesty

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Foreword: Government response to the House of Commons Education Committee report ‘Life Lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools’

It is vital that the education system prepares all pupils for life in modern Britain. Schools have a critical role to play in helping to shape rounded, resilient young people that can face the challenges of the modern world with confidence. They must provide opportunities and encourage their pupils to develop a wider set of skills, which far from being a distraction from academic achievement are vital for pupils’ academic success. These same skills will prepare them to go on to contribute positively to the economy and to society as fully engaged citizens.

PSHE is a curriculum for modern life. A good PSHE education provides young people with both the knowledge and skills to manage their lives, stay safe, make the right decisions and thrive as individuals and members of society. It provides young people with opportunities to develop skills and qualities such as resilience, leadership, communication, empathy and perseverance. We know that these are the skills and qualities that business leaders are crying out for and help to address the productivity gap. We also know that these skills are not innate and that they can and should be developed.

High quality PSHE and age-appropriate SRE teaching are also essential to keeping pupils safe and healthy, inside and outside the school gates. Young people today face unprecedented pressures posed by modern technology. Good quality PSHE can provide them with the information they need to stay safe and build resilience against the risks of exploitation or radicalisation. At its heart, good PSHE supports young people to make informed choices. The majority of schools and teachers recognise the importance of good PSHE education and know that healthy, resilient, confident pupils are better-placed to achieve academically and be stretched further. However, as the committee’s inquiry found, PSHE is not yet good enough in many schools. We want all schools to put high-quality PSHE at the heart of their curriculum.

In March 2015 I announced some new measures to improve the quality of PSHE, including the development of a new, rigorous PSHE quality mark and working with the PSHE association to help them quality assure resources. Now I intend to go further and examine all options, including the recommendations, in making sure PSHE is taught well everywhere.

I am grateful to the committee for their thorough and considered review of PSHE and SRE in schools and I welcome the report and its findings. This response sets out the Government’s commitment to improve the quality of PSHE and SRE in schools.

Nicky Morgan
Secretary of State for Education

Why teach PSHE and SRE in schools?

Recommendation 1: We recommend that the Government explore how pupil wellbeing could be measured in schools. (Paragraph 50)

Response: Maintained schools have a statutory duty to promote children and young people's wellbeing and statutory responsibilities to provide a curriculum that is broadly based, balanced and meets the needs of all pupils. Under section 78 of the Education Act 2002 and the Academies Act 2010 such a curriculum must: promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development of pupils at the school and of society, and prepare pupils at the school for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of later life.

The DfE published the 'the impact of pupil behaviour and wellbeing on educational outcomes' in November 2012 and found that children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social and school wellbeing on average have higher levels of academic achievement. To build on this, the DfE has funded the PSHE Association to produce case studies to highlight best practice. The latest edition of the Governor's handbook (January 2014) also includes questions governors might ask school leaders and teachers about pupils' wellbeing.

The Education Endowment Fund (EEF) has awarded grants to a series of projects that aim to develop the attitudes, skills and behaviours that underpin success in school and work, such as motivation, grit, resilience, self-control, self-confidence, social and emotional skills, and communication skills. Trials will be conducted across large numbers of schools to assess whether there are links between interventions, the development of certain character traits, success at school and longer-term outcomes. These will all be independently evaluated and the results will be added to the Sutton Trust-EEF Toolkit, a resource which offers schools an accessible means of using the latest educational research to inform decision-making.

The provision and quality of PSHE and SRE in schools

Recommendation 2: We recommend that the Government take steps to incentivise schools to raise the quality of PSHE and SRE in schools. (Paragraph 71)

Response: To enable schools to demonstrate excellence in the quality of their PSHE teaching, the Government announced the development of a new, rigorous PSHE quality mark. This will give parents more information about the quality of a school's PSHE provision and will highlight schools which are already providing opportunities for wider development for their pupils through PSHE. It will make it easier for schools struggling in this area to work with the best. The new PSHE quality mark will be brought in line with similar accreditations of its type which require schools to provide evidence for the depth and quality of their teaching in a particular area. The new accreditation will drive improvement in the subject, with many schools seeking the award expected to make tangible improvements to their teaching to achieve the quality mark.

Recent Government actions and the supplementary advice

Recommendation 3: We recommend that the Government formally endorse and issue the 2014 advice produced by the voluntary sector, and promote this advice more actively to schools and governors. (Paragraph 90)

Response: There is a range of good quality advice that has been developed by the voluntary sector in relation to PSHE and SRE. For example, the PSHE Association has produced an excellent resource about the teaching of consent which we have promoted.

When any school provides SRE they have a statutory duty to have regard to the Secretary of State's Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (2000).

We will continue to work with the sector to review the advice and guidance that currently exists.

Recommendation 4: We recommend that the Government monitor schools' compliance with the requirement to publish information about their PSHE and SRE curriculum on their websites. (Paragraph 91)

Response: In September 2014 we reminded schools of their duties to publish a range of information on their websites. This includes details of their curriculum, including PSHE and SRE if appropriate. The Secretary of State's statutory SRE guidance makes clear that all schools are required to have a policy on SRE and to make it available to parents. We are considering options to further strengthen schools' compliance with the requirement to publish information about their curricula on their websites.

Schools can find details of what they must publish on their websites on gov.uk.

Recommendation 5: Ensuring that PSHE and SRE is delivered by confident and capable teachers is crucial to improving the quality of teaching. We recommend that the DfE restore funding for the National PSHE CPD programme, with the aim of ensuring that all primary and secondary schools have at least one teacher who has received specialist training in PSHE, and monitor progress towards this. (Paragraph 117)

Response: We agree that PSHE and SRE should be delivered by competent and capable teachers. However, we do not agree that restoring funding for the National PSHE CPD Programme is the most effective way of achieving this.

We are giving control to schools to decide how best to recruit trainees and provide high quality training to meet their needs - including the teaching of their PSHE curriculum. Schools can work with a range of partners, including teaching schools (which are outstanding schools that work with others to provide high-quality training and development to new and experienced school staff).

PSHE CPD courses are available to teachers. For example the PSHE Association offers a range of one day courses, and substantial qualifications are available through University of Roehampton.

The PSHE Association offers the opportunity for teachers to gain recognition as Chartered Teachers of PSHE Education. Teachers must show that their professional practice meets a demanding set of quality standards drawn from ten, evidence based, principles for the effective teaching of PSHE education.

Recommendation 6: We recommend that the Government ensure that there are sufficient school nurses training places, and that the ratio of school nurses to children is maintained. (Paragraph 118)

Response: Since April 2013, local authorities have been responsible for public health locally, including commissioning public health services for school aged children. This covers school nurses and the Healthy Child Programme.

The Health and Social Care Act 2012 created a duty on the Secretary of State for Health to ensure an effective system is put in place for the provision of education and training in the health service. This duty has been delegated to Health Education England (HEE) and forms the basis for their statutory powers in relation to education and training.

The HEE mandate for 2015/16 asks HEE to continue to work with Public Health England and local authorities to ensure the supply of a well-educated workforce for school aged children and young people, including the provision of school nurses. Recognising the importance of school nurses in supporting children and young people, the Government's vision for the school nursing service includes:

- a commitment to create a strengthened, rejuvenated workforce;
- quality improvements in the school nursing service;
- improved health outcomes for children, young people and families; and
- improved partnership working between school nurses and schools.

Recommendation 7: We recommend that Sex and Relationships Education be renamed "Relationships and Sex Education" to reflect the (existing) focus on relationships and to emphasise the importance of this part of children and young people's education. (Paragraph 119)

Response: The committee is right to recognise that the focus of SRE is helping young people to build healthy relationships, and to identify those relationships which are unhealthy. Schools are already free to describe 'SRE' lessons as is most appropriate for them. However, the government does not agree that is necessary to change a well understood term at this time.

Recommendation 8: We recommend that all schools be required to run a regular consultation with parents on the school's SRE provision, in a way that allows all parents to participate. (Paragraph 121)

Response: We strongly agree. All schools teaching SRE are required to follow statutory guidance. This guidance states that governing bodies and head teachers should consult parents in developing their sex and relationship education policy to ensure that they develop policies which reflect parents' wishes and the culture of the community they serve.

Schools must publish their school curriculum on their website by subject and academic year, including the provision of PSHE and SRE. Parents can access this and hold the school to account.

Recommendation 9: We recommend that Ofsted inspect schools' engagement with parents on Sex and Relationships Education. (Paragraph 122)

Recommendation 10: We recommend that Ofsted set out clearly in the school inspection handbook the way in which a school's PSHE provision relates to Ofsted's judgements on safeguarding and pupils' "spiritual, moral, social and cultural development". (Paragraph 123)

Recommendation 11: We recommend that the Government commission Ofsted to produce regular subject survey reports on the quality of PSHE and SRE. (Paragraph 124)

Response: On 15 June, Ofsted published its inspection framework and supporting handbook for the new approach to school inspection that takes effect from September 2015. Under the new arrangements inspectors will expect to see schools providing a broad, deep and relevant curriculum, which encompasses a range of subjects and courses that help pupils acquire knowledge, understanding and skills in all aspects of their education, so that they are well prepared for life in modern Britain.

In line with Ofsted's general approach to curriculum subjects, PSHE education is not explicitly covered within the new framework and handbook. But important aspects of PSHE education and SRE will be considered in a proportionate and integrated way, linked to the core inspection areas. Inspections will continue to examine pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development, and there will be a new judgement on pupils' personal development, behaviour and welfare. Inspectors will expect pupils to be able to explain accurately and confidently how to keep themselves healthy and safe in different situations; to make informed choices about matters concerning their well-being; and to have an age-appropriate understanding of healthy relationships and how to stay safe from abuse and exploitation.

Ofsted will not routinely check that schools are meeting statutory requirements. Inspectors will however look at what information the school publishes about the curriculum. If it emerged, when assessing the performance of a school, that there were issues relating to specific statutory requirements not being met, this would be considered and reflected as appropriate in the inspection report.

Inspectors will also look at how effectively the school engages with parents, including how well the school gathers, understands and responds to the views of parents.

We will consider with Ofsted how best to capture evidence on the quality of PSHE education and SRE.

Recommendation 12: We recommend that the DfE clarify that children in primary schools should be taught the proper names for genitalia as part of the National Curriculum. (Paragraph 125)

Response: In primary schools, at key stage 1 (ages 5 to 7), pupils are taught about the main external body parts. While we have not specified sexual parts of the body at this stage, teachers will be able to cover this material if they think it is appropriate to the needs of their pupils.

At key stage 2 (ages seven to 11), pupils learn about changes to the human body as it grows from birth to old age. Puberty is a significant part of this and will be covered during upper key stage 2, as part of content on the human life cycle.

The status of PSHE and SRE

Recommendation 13: The DfE must clarify the current status of SRE, including in different kinds of schools, and communicate this message clearly to schools. (Paragraph 145)

Response: Ministers have been clear that schools should offer high-quality sex and relationship education that is relevant and sensitive to the needs of all young people. The current National Curriculum gov.uk web page clearly sets out the legal duty of maintained schools to teach SRE at key stages 3 and 4, including teaching about reproduction, sexuality and sexual health. Distinctions are made between the different legal duties of maintained schools and academies at all key stages on this web page. Academy and free school funding agreements also clearly state that if they choose to include SRE as part of their curriculum provision, they must have regard for the Secretary of State's statutory SRE guidance.

We will continue to be clear in departmental communications about the status of SRE in all schools.

Recommendation 14: We recommend that the DfE develop a workplan for introducing age-appropriate PSHE and RSE as statutory subjects in primary and secondary schools, setting out its strategy for improving the supply of teachers able to deliver this subject and a timetable for achieving this. The statutory requirement should have a minimal prescription in content, and should be constructed with the aim of ensuring that curriculum time is devoted to the subject. Alongside this, statutory guidance should be developed to enhance schools' duty to work with parents in this area and secure and effective home-school partnership. (Paragraph 148)

Response: The Government wants all young people to leave school prepared for life in modern Britain. We agree with the committee that high-quality PSHE and SRE have a vital role to play in this by providing a curriculum for modern life. The Government also agrees that there is more that we can do to emphasise its importance and improve the quality and provision of PSHE education which is not yet good enough in too many schools. That is why we announced a package of support for PSHE in March 2015, including the development of a rigorous new PSHE quality mark for schools to demonstrate excellence in their teaching and further work with the PSHE Association to help them quality assure resources produced by other organisations to ensure that teachers have access to the best materials.

We now want to go further, and will take forward work with the sector to develop further measures to improve the quality of PSHE. We want to make significant progress on this issue this parliament, and will consider in full the arguments put forward by the Select Committee as part of this work before reporting back later this year.

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