

Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) in Schools - Update

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Summary

In February 2016 the Government [announced](#) that it would not make Personal, Social, Health and Economics (PSHE) Education compulsory in schools despite long-standing calls from select committees, campaign groups and leading organisations to do so in order to improve the provision and quality of PSHE teaching. Existing guidance is retained which gives responsibility to schools to determine what is taught, along with an expectation that “all schools should teach PSHE, drawing on good practice”.

The Government acknowledged that PSHE is a crucial part of preparing young people for life and committed to improve the quality of PSHE teaching in schools. Within the next few months the Department for Education will produce an action plan and recommendations for improving PSHE, as well as a PSHE toolkit for schools.

With much media attention given to the debate about the statutory status of PSHE, this briefing aims to help professionals, particularly those less familiar with this area, understand this topic in more detail, providing an overview of:

- The policy context and chronology of the debate;
- The guidance on PSHE and SRE;
- Case studies and examples of good practice;
- The key findings and recommendations of the Education Select Committee's inquiry on PSHE and SRE [Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools](#) published in February 2015 (LGiU has produced a more comprehensive briefing on this [HERE](#));
- The Government's response and next steps.

The briefing concludes with a commentary on the reaction to the Government's response.

Overview

Personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) is defined by the PSHE Association as:

“a planned programme of learning through which children and young people acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to manage their lives, now and in the future.”

The subject is non-statutory but the Government expects that “all schools should teach PSHE, drawing on good practice.” In 2013, on the back of an internal review of PSHE, the Government issued new guidance which reaffirmed its position that it is the responsibility of schools to determine what is taught. The guidance states that: “PSHE is a non-statutory subject. To allow teachers the flexibility to deliver high-quality PSHE we consider it unnecessary to provide new

standardised frameworks or programmes of study. PSHE can encompass many areas of study. Teachers are best placed to understand the needs of their pupils and do not need additional central prescription.”

In 2014 the PSHE Association published its own [programme of study](#) for PSHE, covering Key Stages 1 to 4. The programme covers: diversity and equality, relationships of different kinds, personal financial choices, drugs education, the importance of respecting and protecting the environment, and people’s rights and responsibilities as members of families and other groups, and as citizens.

Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) is recognised as a key component of PSHE and is defined as:

“[the] learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health.”

Some aspects of SRE, such as the biological aspects of human growth and reproduction, are taught in science rather than PSHE. SRE has a statutory footing in the Education Act 1996 and the Learning and Skills Act 2000. Local authority maintained schools must teach SRE from age 11 upwards and must have regard to the Government’s [SRE guidance](#). Academies and free schools do not have this obligation since they are not bound to the National Curriculum, but if they decide to teach SRE they must also have regard to the guidance.

In 2013 Ofsted, in its report [Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education](#) raised concerns about the variation in the quality of PSHE provision and found that it required improvement in 40 per cent of schools – on the flip side schools judged ‘outstanding’ by Ofsted were also likely to have outstanding PSHE education programmes. The Education Select Committee launched a wide-ranging [inquiry](#) into PSHE in 2014 and was joined by the health, home affairs and business, innovation and skills select committees, as well as association bodies and campaign groups, in calling for PSHE and SRE to be made statutory subjects to raise the quality of teaching.

The Education Committee’s final report [Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools](#) published in February 2015 recommended that the Department for Education (DfE) develops a “work plan” for introducing age-appropriate PSHE and SRE as statutory subjects in primary and secondary schools, and that teachers receive continued professional training in the subject.

In February 2016 the Education Secretary Nicky Morgan confirmed that PSHE would not be made statutory insisting that doing so “would do little to tackle the most pressing problems with the subject”. She announced that over the next few months a leading group of head teachers and practitioners who have been working with the DfE will produce an action plan and recommendations for improving PSHE, including publishing a PSHE toolkit for schools.

The chronology of the policy activity and debate surrounding PSHE is outlined in the table below with links to relevant documentation.

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Table 1: A chronology of PSHE policy activity 2013-16

Date	Activity
May 2013	Ofsted reported that personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) required improvement in 40 per cent of schools.
Sept 2013	The Department for Education (DfE) issued new guidance on PSHE handing responsibility to schools to determine what is taught.
Jan 2014	As part of the Children and Families Bill, the House of Lords debated amendments which would have had the effect of making SRE compulsory in schools. Though the amendments were not made, the debate reignited parliamentary interest in the role of PSHE and SRE in schools.
Apr 2014	The Education Committee launched a wide-ranging inquiry into PSHE
June 2014	The Sex Education Forum called for all state primary and secondary schools to teach about consent and relationships
July 2014	The Home Affairs Committee identified the importance of PHSE in covering education about female genital mutilation in high prevalence areas and called for it to be made compulsory. The Children's Commissioner for England and the Chief Medical Officer joined in calls to make PHSE statutory.
Sept 2014	The PSHE Association published its own programme of study for PSHE , covering Key Stages 1-4.
Nov 2014	An Expert Group created by the DfE published a report setting out recommendations to improve the quality of PSHE and make it a statutory entitlement.
Jan 2015	The Joint Committee on Human Rights said it would be better if schools were required to teach the same curriculum in PSHE and that this should include issues in relation to violence against women and girls.
Feb 2015	The Education Committee concluded its inquiry and published the report Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools which recommended that the DfE develops a "work plan" for introducing age-appropriate PSHE and SRE as statutory subjects in primary and secondary schools, and that teachers receive continued professional training in the subject. This recommendation is echoed in a report from the Office of the Children's Commissioner .
Mar 2015	Education Secretary Nicky Morgan MP announced that the Government would introduce a new charter mark for schools in conjunction with the PSHE Association, along with new guidance on teaching the law of consent.
July 2015	The Government published its response to the Education Committee's report and said it would examine options to improve the quality of PSHE and SRE in schools but would not make it statutory. Chair of the Education Committee, Neil Carmichael MP criticised the response and said that it was "disappointing" that "Ministers entirely sidestep the call made by MPs in the closing months of the last Parliament to give statutory status to PSHE." Caroline Lucas MP presented a new Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (Statutory Requirement) Bill 2015-16 , which would make PSHE, including SRE, compulsory in all state-funded schools. Supported at first reading by 183 votes to 44.
Oct 2015	The PSHE Association published A Curriculum for Life stating that "statutory status for PSHE education is supported by 92% of pupils, 90% of parents, 88% of teachers and 85% of business leaders" and that non-statutory status was the root of the problems facing PSHE.
Nov 2015	The Chair of the Education Committee wrote to the Education Secretary requesting an update on statutory status, and that the arguments for doing so should be considered carefully.
Jan 2016	The Chairs of the education, health, home affairs and business, innovation and skills select committees wrote to the Education Secretary and called for statutory PSHE and SRE, citing committee reports and statements from the Children's Commissioner and Chief Medical Officer in support of this.
Feb 2016	The Education Secretary responded saying the Government will continue to keep the subject's status under review, adding that doing so "would do little to tackle the most pressing problems with the subject". The letter prompted objection and challenge from campaign groups including the Sex Education Forum and the PSHE Association.
Spring 2016	In her letter the Education Secretary announced that over the next few months a leading group of head teachers and practitioners who have been working with the DfE will produce an action plan and recommendations for improving PSHE, including publishing a PSHE toolkit for schools. The Sex Education Forum and the PSHE Association continue to run high profile campaigns to make PSHE and SRE statutory. Caroline Lucas' Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (Statutory Requirement) Bill 2015-16 will receive its second reading on 22 April 2016.

Briefing in full

Guidance

PSHE Guidance

The non-prescriptive nature of the Government's [guidance on PSHE](#) points schools to "build, where appropriate, on the statutory content already outlined in the national curriculum, the basic school curriculum and in statutory guidance on: drug education, financial education, sex and relationship education (SRE) and the importance of physical activity and diet for a healthy lifestyle."

Section 2.5 of the national curriculum framework states that all schools should make provision for PSHE, drawing on good practice.

The PSHE Association's [PSHE Education Programme of Study \(Key Stages 1 - 4\)](#) published in October 2014 helps schools to meet this objective by identifying the key concepts and skills that underpin PSHE education and help schools to fulfil their statutory responsibility to support pupils' spiritual, moral, cultural, mental and physical development and prepare them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of life as set out in Section 78 of the Education Act 2002.

The programme is based on three core themes: health and wellbeing, relationships and living in the wider world. The programme states that the overarching aim for PSHE education is to provide pupils with:

- accurate and relevant knowledge;
- opportunities to turn that knowledge into personal understanding;
- opportunities to explore, clarify and if necessary challenge, their own and others' values, attitudes, beliefs, rights and responsibilities; and
- the skills, language and strategies they need in order to live healthy, safe, fulfilling, responsible and balanced lives.

The overarching concepts outlined in the programme to support schools develop their own PSHE programmes are:

- 1) **Identity** (their personal qualities, attitudes, skills, attributes and achievements and what influences these)
- 2) **Relationships** (including different types and in different settings)
- 3) **A healthy** (including physically, emotionally and socially) **balanced lifestyle** (including within relationships, work-life, exercise and rest, spending and saving and diet)
- 4) **Risk** (identification, assessment and how to manage risk rather than simply the avoidance of risk for self and others) and safety (including behaviour and strategies to employ in different settings)
- 5) **Diversity and equality** (in all its forms)
- 6) **Rights** (including the notion of universal human rights), responsibilities (including fairness and justice) and consent (in different contexts)
- 7) **Change** (as something to be managed) **and resilience** (the skills, strategies and 'inner resources' we can draw on when faced with challenging change or circumstance)
- 8) **Power** (how it is used and encountered in a variety of contexts including persuasion, bullying, negotiation and 'win-win' outcomes)

9) Career (including enterprise, employability and economic understanding)

The programme acknowledges the 'essential skills' that PSHE contributes to in terms of learning outcomes: intrapersonal skills for self-management, interpersonal skills for positive relationships and skills for enquiry.

SRE Guidance

The key features of the Government's [statutory guidance on SRE](#) are set out in the table below. The points are not exhaustive and readers should consult the guidance in full to ensure compliance. A challenge that some MPs have raised is that this guidance was published before the mass use of mobile phones to access the internet and the rise of social media, and should therefore be updated.

Table 2: Key points from the DfE statutory guidance on sex and relationship education (2000)

Chapter	Key Points
Developing a Policy for Sex and Relationship Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> All schools must have an up-to-date sex and relationship education policy, drawn up by the governing body, and available to parents and for inspection. Primary schools should have clear parameters on what children will be taught in the transition year before moving to secondary school, and that parents be consulted. Secondary schools' policies must include how they will teach the relevant National Curriculum Science topics and how they will provide sex and relationship education as part of PSHE.
Specific Issues when Teaching Sex and Relationship Education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sensitive issues should be covered by a school's policy. Both boys and girls should be prepared for puberty. Girls should be prepared for menstruation before their periods start. Young people need access to, and precise information about, confidential contraceptive information, advice and services. Young people need to be aware of the moral and personal dilemmas involved in abortion and know how to access a relevant agency if necessary. Young people need to be aware of the risks of STIs including HIV and know about prevention, diagnosis and treatment. Young people need to know not just what safer sex is and why it is important but also how to negotiate it with a partner.
Sex and Relationship Education within PSHE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sex and relationship education should be supported by a school's wider curriculum for personal, social and health education.
Teaching strategies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools need to help children and young people develop confidence in talking, listening and thinking about sex and relationships. Teachers and other staff can use a range of strategies to help them do this, including establishing ground rules, introducing 'distancing' techniques, making use of discussion and project learning, and encouraging reflection.
Working with parents	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Parents need support in their role as sex educators. Schools should always work in partnership with parents, consulting them regularly on the content of sex and relationship education programmes. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from all or part of sex and relationship education
Working with the wider community	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Delivery of sex and relationship education is not the sole responsibility of schools. Parents and members of the wider community have much to offer. Health professionals, social workers, youth workers, peer educators, and visitors all have a part to play in delivering sex and relationship education and should abide by the school's policy.
Confidentiality	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schools should have a clear and explicit confidentiality policy which is advertised to pupils, staff, parents and visitors.

PSHE Case Studies

Both Ofsted and the PSHE Association identify a number of case studies where schools are providing high quality PSHE and SRE. The PSHE Association makes the important point that schools judged 'outstanding' by Ofsted were also likely to have outstanding PSHE education programmes.

Ofsted highlights the following schools as case studies of good practice:

- [Notre Dame RC School](#) – has helped girls learn to develop high self-esteem and skills to negotiate healthy, happy relationships and learn about abuse and consent.
- [Cale Green Primary School](#) – has involved families in high quality relationships and sex education
- [Oak Cottage Primary School](#) – developed a successful positive body image programme.
- [Bennerley Fields](#) – has given pupils with special educational needs a say on services through its 'pupil voice'
- [St John Bosco Roman Catholic](#) – established a caring, inclusive learning environment to integrate children with complex needs into mainstream school.

The PSHE association highlights the following schools as case studies of good practice:

- [St Martin's School](#) – "The combination of a well-resourced, evidence based, developmental programme, with each tutor focusing on just one aspect of PSHE education, ensured that Ofsted lesson observations were judged 'good' and in many cases 'outstanding'"
- [St Margaret Clitherow Roman Catholic Primary School](#) – "PSHE and the supporting learning are contributing to both the relationships within the school and a school culture."
- [Newent Community School](#) – "Students have a good understanding of the key issues of keeping safe, appropriate to their age. This includes aspects of e-safety, sexual health and of substance abuse, including cigarettes and alcohol."
- [Forest Oak School](#) – The Headteacher is says that the skills and improved relationship skills, provided by their planned PSHE education programme, have helped the school to be judged an outstanding school.
- [Hurworth School](#) – Work includes cyber bullying, neighbourhood safety, addressing racism, LGBT awareness and challenging homophobia (in partnership with Stonewall), and the role of external agents in safety and enforcement.
- [St George the Martyr Church of England Primary School](#) - PSHE provision is a key part of the school's approach to realising its overall school aims.
- [The Beacon CE Primary School](#) – the school has gathered evidence that PSHE '....adds much value to safeguarding e.g. reduction in e-safety incidents and increased knowledge when the school interviews pupils'.
- [The St Christopher School Academy Trust](#) – An "excellent" personal, social and health education programme is teaching pupils how to keep themselves safe physically and emotionally, as well as on the internet and when using social media sites.
- [Worcesters School](#) – a planned, developmental PSHE programme of between thirty minutes and one hour a week is being constantly enriched by flexible additional learning"

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The PSHE Association identifies some common success factors that cut across these examples:

- A discrete, developmental and responsive PSHE education programme at the centre of the school curriculum;
- PSHE education managed by an experienced, central co-ordinator with a genuine passion for the subject in their school;
- A senior leadership committed to monitoring the quality of PSHE teaching with the same rigour and expectations as other subjects;
- Active involvement from members of the senior leadership team in teaching PSHE;
- PSHE education built around clear learning objectives and expected learning outcomes;
- PSHE education treated with the same regard as other subjects on the school's curriculum;
- Clear learning objectives which differentiate PSHE education where it is 'blended' with other subjects, such as education, citizenship and RE;
- Scope for flexibility and creativity to change the direction of lessons in response to pupil need;
- Recognition by schools that PSHE education helps to develop transferable skills, such as listening, questioning, and team-working, that support academic success and success in life beyond school;
- A single 'unifying framework' or philosophy;
- External visitors used within the context of a planned PSHE programme; and
- Active involvement of governing bodies.

Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools

The House of Commons Education Committee Report, [*Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools*](#) was published on 17 February 2015. The Committee received over 430 written submissions during the inquiry, including a large number from individual parents. The report's key recommendation was that age-appropriate Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) should become a statutory subject in primary and secondary schools. Launching the report, the then chair of the committee, Graham Stuart emphasised that:

"There is an overwhelming demand for statutory sex and relationships education from teachers, parents and young people themselves. It's important that school leaders and governors take PSHE seriously and improve their provision...Statutory status will help ensure all of this happens".

The Committee concluded that the Government's "...current strategy for improving PSHE is weak, with a mismatch between the priority that ministers claim they give PSHE and the steps that have been taken to improve the quality of teaching in the subject."

LGiU produced a briefing on the inquiry and the report [HERE](#). The key findings and recommendations are noted below along with the Government's response.

Key Findings

On the impact on young people's life outcomes, the report found that:

- social media and internet access had changed the context for PSHE and SRE in particular. The increasing ease in access to pornography was shaping young people's behaviours and self-image.

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- SRE can have an impact on a range of outcomes for young people such as teenage pregnancies and sexually transmitted infections (STIs).
- the UK as a whole compares poorly with many of its EU neighbours in terms of live births to women aged 15-17, at 9.2 per 1,000 women in 2012, well above the EU average of 6.5, even though the under-18 conception rate in England has fallen by over 40% since 1998. In evidence given, this was used both to prove that SRE does not work and that SRE provision was urgently needed.
- young people reported a link between PSHE and the way that they think about health issues. 74 per cent of respondents to the Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children survey in 2014 felt that PSHE classes helped them to look after their own health and improved their skills and abilities to consider the importance of their own health.
- evidence revealed that SRE was regarded as vital as a child protection measure and PSHE can be seen as a way of addressing bullying in schools, and in particular, 'cyber bullying'
- a small minority of parents argued that PSHE, and SRE, in particular, should be seen as the responsibility of parents rather than the state
- Ofsted felt that effectiveness is best measured through surveys and research. Pupil wellbeing was seen as a proxy for the effectiveness of PSHE

On the provision and quality of PSHE and SRE in schools the committee concluded that interventions taken by the Government to improve quality, which included reaffirming the importance of PSHE in the introduction to the new National Curriculum, were "insufficient to make much difference". The report said that the relationships aspect of PSHE may be particularly squeezed since academies and free schools were not bound by the national curriculum

A particular focus of the report was on action related to the supply of trained professionals for the delivery of PSHE and SRE, as a key enabler of high quality provision. The committee noted that:

- the quality of leadership and management in PSHE required improvement in 42 per cent of schools;
- the subject's lack of statutory status meant there was a lower demand for PSHE-trained teachers;
- there has been a drop in the number of teachers accessing continued professional development (CPD) for PSHE in the face of its non-statutory status;
- the school nursing workforce is overstretched with an increase in safeguarding and child protection work preventing staff undertaking wider health promotion roles;
- a decline in the number of local authority advisers specialising in PSHE and SRE was also noted in written evidence.

Key recommendations

The key recommendations in the committee's report were:

- The Department for Education develops a "work plan" for introducing age-appropriate PSHE and SRE as statutory subjects in primary and secondary schools;
- Trends in teenage conceptions and STIs are driven by factors far outside the provision of SRE in schools...instead the quality of PSHE and SRE should be measured through Ofsted inspections and through levels of student and parent satisfaction. This should be the focus for the Government. The Government should explore how pupil wellbeing could be measured in schools;

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- The Government take steps to incentivise schools to raise the quality of PSHE and SRE in schools;
- The Government formally endorses and issues the [2014 advice](#) produced by the voluntary sector and promote this advice more actively to schools and governors;
- DfE restore funding for the National PSHE CPD programme with the aim that all primary and secondary schools have at least one teacher specialist in PSHE. The Government should ensure that there are sufficient school nurses training places
- Schools consult regularly with parents on SRE provision, with parents retaining the right to withdraw their child

Government response

The Government [response](#) published in July 2015 did not adopt the committee's main recommendation that PSHE should be made a statutory subject, but it said it would keep this under review. The Government argued that changing the statutory status of PSHE would not address the underlying need to raise the standard and quality of provision. The Government's response put the focus on the policies that it had already committed to, or planned to introduce, to improve the quality of PSHE and SRE, which included the following announcements:

- the DfE has funded the PSHE Association to produce case studies to highlight best practice.
- 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.
- the development of a new, rigorous PSHE quality mark to 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.
- reminding schools of their duties to publish a range of information on their website, including details of their curriculum and PSHE and SRE if appropriate.

Responding to the recommendations on training and development the Government said that restoring funding for the National PSHE CPD Programme was not the most effective way of increasing the quality of teaching. The Government confirmed: "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)."

The Government said it will take forward work with the sector to develop further measures to improve the quality of PSHE.

Next steps

In her letter dated 10 February 2016 in response to the joint letter of the four government select committees calling for PSHE to be made statutory, the Education Secretary confirmed that the Department for Education will in the next few months produce an action plan and recommendations for improving PSHE, including publishing a PSHE toolkit for schools.

She said: "While we will continue to keep the status of PSHE in the curriculum under review, our immediate focus will be on improving the quality of PSHE teaching in our schools"

"My Department has been working with a group of leading head teachers and practitioners, who are best placed to know what needs to be done within schools to transform and improve PSHE. Over the next few months they will produce an action plan and recommendations for improving PSHE, including publishing a comprehensive PSHE toolkit for schools. This will help schools plan and develop their own PSHE curriculum, help them assess learning and impact and set out how schools can deliver PSHE as part of a broad offer to pupils and parents. I have also received representations about updating the existing SRE guidance which I will carefully consider."

Comment and reaction

Not surprisingly, the Government's response triggered considerable objection from those that had been calling for the statutory status of PSHE, not least from the Chair of the Education Committee who was critical of the Government's response.

Neil Carmichael MP, Chair of Education Select Committee:

"The response made by the Government is disappointing. Ministers entirely sidestep the call made by MPs in the closing months of the last Parliament to give statutory status to PSHE.

"They also reject or brush over nearly every other recommendation made by the previous Education Committee in their key report published five months ago. It is unclear why it should have taken the Government so long to publish such a feeble response."

The PSHE Association and the Sex Education Forum, which have both organised high profile media campaigns (see the 'It's my right' campaign [HERE](#)) in favour of statutory status with the backing of over 100 leading organisations, also reacted with disappointment.

Joe Hayman, Chief Executive of the PSHE Association said:

"This is an appalling failure. In making this decision, the Government has ignored not just the Education Committee but also the Home Affairs Committee, the Joint Committee on Human Rights, the Chairs of the Commons Health and Business, Innovation and Skills Committees, Parliamentarians from across the political spectrum, the Children's Commissioner, the Chief Medical Officer, the Association for Directors of Public Health, the Association of Police and Crime Commissioners, the Association of Independent Local Safeguarding Children Boards Chairs, the NSPCC, two royal societies, six medical royal colleges, over 100 expert bodies, 85% of business leaders, 88% of teachers, 90% of parents and 92% of young people.

"What is most baffling about this decision is that the Government has a range of objectives it seeks to achieve through PSHE education, including teaching pupils to stay safe online, promoting children and young people's mental health and preventing radicalisation, child sexual exploitation and violence against women and girls. Its decision not to address a status quo in which these issues are addressed by untrained teachers in inadequate curriculum time – or left off the curriculum altogether – is self-defeating and leaves vulnerable young people at risk."

Lucy Emmerson, co-ordinator of the Sex Education Forum said:

"Sex and relationships education (SRE) is every child's right, yet the government has ignored the views of parents, teachers and pupils, and failed to guarantee that all children, in all schools, get this vital learning for life.

'While a focus on improving the quality of SRE and a review of the guidance given to schools are welcome we need to go further. SRE must begin in primary school and build year-on-year to enable young people to understand a wide spectrum of issues, including the difference between acceptable and abusive behaviour, consent and sexual health.'

SRE has been placed firmly in the media spotlight following the recent child abuse issues in Rotherham and Greater Manchester, the risks around abusive relationships, the meaning of sexual consent and the increase in cyber bullying and 'sexting'. The Association of Teachers and Lecturers (ATL) emphasised the role of PSHE in tackling child sexual exploitation in their response.

Dr Mary Bousted, general secretary of the ATL said:

"ATL is extremely disappointed that, yet again, the Government has refused to make it mandatory for children to be taught PSHE in schools. When report after report following the tragic sex abuse cases in Rotherham and Oxford point out that PSHE keeps children safe, how can Nicky Morgan refuse time and time again to make PSHE mandatory in all schools. How can the Government look young people in the eye and tell them that their personal, social, health and economic needs are just not that important."

The National AIDS Trust meanwhile highlighted the importance of high quality PSHE and SRE for LGBT young people.

Deborah Gold, CEO at NAT (National AIDS Trust), said:

"In our survey of young gay and bisexual men in 2014, we found 75% had never received information on relationships and being attracted to other guys and 33% had never received information about how HIV is passed on. The number of young men diagnosed with HIV has doubled in the past 10 years, yet the Government seems willing to continue to allow a situation where some schools simply don't have to discuss these topics beyond basic information in a science lesson. We will continue to fight for PSHE and SRE in all schools and for all young people. We don't call for statutory status as the solution to all our problems, we call for it as the bare minimum."

Parenting principles are at the heart of the debate around PSHE, with those in favour of statutory status highlighting a range of statistics that show that the majority of parents are in support of this, while those against argue that sex education is firmly the responsibility of parents alone. For others the debate is about preserving childhood as late as possible in contrast to those who believe young people with the right education and tools will help them progress more safely into adulthood. The different sides on this issue were highlighted in the first reading of Caroline Lucas' private members bill which was eventually supported by 183 MPs to 44 against.

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Caroline Lucas MP:

“Working with parents is critical. This is about partnership. Parents want PSHE and SRE in school next to traditional subjects. YouGov and the PSHE Association have found that 90% of parents believe that schools should teach about mental health and emotional wellbeing. I know that some people believe this issue should be left to parents, but what schools do when they provide good-quality SRE is precisely to involve parents and work with them. The truth is that many parents simply do not have these vital conversations with their children. A national survey showed that fathers were the main source of information about sex for only 3% of boys.”

Philip Davies MP:

“Unless and until we give parents responsibility for bringing up their children, they are not going to exercise that responsibility properly. We should not think that the state can be parents in disguise; we must trust parents to bring up their children and do the best for them.

“Parents who do not want their children to have the values of their teacher inflicted on them when they may be against the values of those parents should be supported by this Parliament in being able to remove their children from such lessons if they see fit. Parental responsibility, parental choice and the freedom of parents to allow children to be brought up with their values should be protected in this House, not just trampled over because we happen to have different individual opinions.”

For now at least, campaigners will have to settle on the statutory status of PSHE remaining ‘under review’ and engage with the Government on how to drive up standards of PSHE provision in schools across the country. An overhaul of the existing SRE guidance must be a starting point where both sides of the debate can come together around; at over 15 years old it pre-dates the mass use of mobile phones to access the internet. A key driver for change must be the fact that young people themselves consistently report that the sex and relationships education (SRE) they receive is inadequate. Their voice must be at the heart of the Government’s forthcoming improvement plan.

External links

Department for Education (2000) [Sex and Relationship Education Guidance](#)

Department for Education (2015) [Government response to the Education Select Committee's report 'Life Lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools'](#)

Education Select Committee (2014) [Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools](#)

Ofsted (2013) [Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education](#)

PSHE Association (2014) [PSHE Education Programme of Study \(Key Stages 1 - 4\)](#)

Related briefing and essential guide

LGIU (2015) [Briefing: Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools – Commons Education Committee](#)

For further information, please visit www.lgiu.org.uk or email john.fowler@lgiu.org.uk