



## Confederation of School Trusts

### Changes to the teaching of Relationship and Sex Education and PSHE

#### Response of the Confederation of School Trusts

##### **A Introduction**

1 The Confederation of School Trusts (CST) represents circa 1,000 academies, multi-academy trusts and foundation schools, representing joined up leadership across executive, governance and business leaders. We are the national organisation and sector body for school trusts. This places us in a strong position to consider the National Education Service from the viewpoint of the system's executive and governance leaders in self-governing schools and trusts.

2 We are completely apolitical. We work with political parties and politicians across the spectrum to advance education in the public interest.

3 CST welcomes the opportunity to respond to this call for evidence.

4 Our remarks are organised in sections as follows:

**A Relationships in primary schools**

**B Relationships and sex education in secondary schools**

**C Relationships Education and RSE specific to the digital context**

**D Communication with parents on Relationships Education and RSE**

**E Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) - primary**

**F PSHE in secondary schools**

**G Flexibility in delivering the PSHE curriculum**

**H Conclusion**

##### **A Relationships in primary schools**

###### **What are the 3 most important areas?**

1. Positive relationships starting with age-appropriate child-to-child relationships/ friendships.  
This should cover for example, permission, consent, shared interest etc.

2. Relationship with myself - knowing which parts of my body are private, good touch and bad touch. For older primary children this should cover puberty education - not just the science of puberty which is already covered in the Science curriculum, but the affective impact of puberty on relationships.
3. Diversity of family models and relationships.

These three are not hierarchical. A fourth critically important subject area is safety on the internet (covered below).

## **B Relationships and sex education in secondary schools**

### **What are the three most important subject areas?**

Bearing in mind age appropriateness, RSE should be 'sex-positive'; that is, it should be open, frank and informative, and should acknowledge the pleasures of sex. It should reflect that some young people are sexually active and acknowledge young people's autonomy and level of maturity. It should not focus on abstinence, but outline abstinence as one possible approach. RSE should:

- Reflect sexual diversity. It should discuss a range of sexual activity (not just heterosexual intercourse), as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues and relationships.
- Include teaching on consent, sexting, cyberbullying, online safety, sexual exploitation and sexual coercion.
- Challenge, rather than reinforce, gender stereotypes and inequalities.
- Be culturally sensitive.
- Provide impartial information on contraception, safer sex, STIs, pregnancy and abortion.
- Discuss relationships and emotions.
- Where appropriate, potentially risky practices should be considered in combination, or example considering the risks of sexual activity alongside substance use.
- Lessons on the risks of sexual activity need to be developed carefully; an overemphasis on risk can alienate some young people, particularly if the risks are emphasised at the expense of the positive and pleasurable aspects of sex.

[Adapted from Pound P, Denford S, Shucksmith J, et al. What is best practice in sex and relationship education? A synthesis of evidence, including stakeholders' views. *BMJ Open* 2017; 7:10]

## **C Relationships Education and RSE specific to the digital context**

**Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education?**

For primary: safety on the internet: how to manage virtual relationships. The particular point here is to help young children understand that people may not be who they say they are.

For secondary: all of the above, plus the risks of on-line grooming.

**D Communication with parents on Relationships Education and RSE**

**How should schools effectively consult parents so they can make informed decisions?**

Schools/ trusts should publish a policy and clear schedule of what is being taught by topic, and when. The relationships education curriculum in primary school is perhaps less likely to be controversial, and parents have no right of withdrawal.

The secondary curriculum is likely to be more controversial for some parents/ communities. Best practice is to offer parents the right to review materials in the RSE curriculum and offer discussion with key teachers/ leaders on the rationale and context for any particular topics that parents may find controversial. Schools could also consider working with faith leaders in their communities.

**E Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) - primary**

**What do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why?**

The three pillars of PSHE traditionally are:

1. Mental and physical health,
2. Understanding economic wellbeing and financial capability, careers and enterprise education
3. RSE (covered in the previous questions)

Early teaching of the importance of physical health is relatively uncontroversial. The teaching of mental health and wellbeing is less developed in primary provision.

It should include helping young children to think about themselves, to learn from their experiences, to recognise and celebrate their strengths and set simple but challenging goals; about good and not so good feelings, a vocabulary to describe their feelings to others and simple strategies for managing feelings; about change and loss and the associated feelings; about people who look after them, their family networks, who to go to if they are worried and how to attract their attention.

We agree with the PSHE Association that age appropriate economic wellbeing and financial capability can be taught in primary schools. Pupils in key stages 1 and 2 (ages 5-11) should be taught about:

- where money comes from, keeping it safe and the importance of managing it effectively;
- how money plays an important part in people's lives;
- a basic understanding of enterprise.

## **F PSHE in secondary schools**

### **Thinking about PSHE in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why?**

Building on the primary curriculum, secondary PSHE should include both mental and physical health and understanding economic wellbeing and financial capability, career and enterprise education.

In relation to mental health, there is a relatively small corpus of knowledge about how to recognise the early signs of serious mental health problems as opposed to the normal range of human responses. The curriculum should also include strategies for managing mental health including stress, anxiety, depression, self-harm and suicide, and sources of help and support, where and how to obtain health information, advice and support.

There is also evidence, particularly from Australia, about whole school cultures that promote good mental health. It would be helpful to learn from this research.

In relation to economic wellbeing, financial capacity, careers and enterprise education, young people's imaginations can be captured by through the study of global economics, wealth disparity and the impact on life outcomes, environmental research - and other big economic, political, social and technological issues that characterise our age.

Financial capability should include making good and responsible financial decisions, debt, the danger of debt, on-line gambling and how personal financial choices can affect oneself and others.

We believe there is a clear opportunity for schools to help young people practice enterprise activity in a safe and secure environment.

## **G Flexibility in delivering the PSHE curriculum**

### **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?**

PSHE is currently non-statutory. Recent legislation allows the government to make PSHE compulsory in all schools. PSHE is undoubtedly important. As an alternative to a making PSHE compulsory, we

propose that a duty could be placed on schools/ trusts to promote physical and mental health and wellbeing, economic wellbeing, financial capability, careers and enterprise education. In this way, schools/trusts could use the evidence on whole school approaches to build comprehensive wellbeing and enterprise cultures across the curriculum as well as within the taught curriculum. We believe this may lead to innovation and better practice than compliance with a narrower, statutory taught curriculum.

## **B Conclusion**

5 I hope that this is of value to your call for evidence. CST is willing to be further consulted and to assist in any way that we can.

Leora Cruddas

Chief Executive

Originally posted: 16 September 2018

Amended 10<sup>th</sup> October 2018