

The Education Committee

Inquiry into Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) and
Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in schools

Introduction

1. This written evidence is submitted by Simon Ross, chief executive of Population Matters, on behalf of Population Matters.
2. Population Matters is a membership organization that has existed for more than 20 years. We promote smaller families and mindful consumption in order to make the world a better place. Our vision is of a sustainable future, including decent living standards for all, environmental sustainability and a stable population living within resource constraints. Our goals include universal access to family planning services, an end to discrimination against women throughout the world and a global convergence in living standards.
3. We have an interest in Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) and Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) in schools, as a contributor to reducing unplanned pregnancies and hence the birth rate and ultimately the level of population level.
4. We are a member of the Sex Education Forum and endorse its submission to the Committee.

Executive summary

- The UK has relatively poor sexual health.
- The consequences of poor SHRE are extremely damaging to individuals and society.
- The ability of parents to teach SHRE is limited.
- The performance of schools in teaching SHRE without a statutory framework is variable.
- Objections to statutory SHRE do not take account of the need for individuals to be educated using best practice of they are to assert their sexual and reproductive rights.

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

The importance of PSHE

5. Britain has some of Europe's highest rates of live births, large family sizes, abortions and teenage pregnancy.
6. Unplanned pregnancies disrupt life plans and contribute to a number of undesirable social characteristics: low educational attainment, particularly for young women; low female participation in employment; welfare dependency; weak parent-child relationships; child abuse; failed marital relationships and absent parents, and; multi-generational poverty and deprivation.
7. Unplanned pregnancies also contribute to England's high rate of population growth in what is already one of Europe's most densely populated countries. This growth contributes to issues such as rising cost of living and level of poverty, access to housing, education and health, housing overcrowding, ease of transportation, infrastructure and utility costs, loss of

amenities and green spaces, pollution, food, water and energy security, carbon emissions and unemployment.

8. Bullying can lead to long term negative consequences and even suicide; PSHE counters bullying related to sexual matters: specifically, sexual pressure by the other gender, pressure to emulate peers and homophobia.
9. Poor PHSE can lead to sexual disease and sexual abuse, both of which can have serious health consequences.

Why PSHE ought to be statutory

10. PSHE is relevant to all children.
11. PSHE is important to individuals: unplanned pregnancy, sexually transmitted diseases, bullying and sexual abuse are extremely damaging to pupil's life outcomes.
12. PSHE is important to society: as stated above, the consequences of poor PSHE imposes huge social, economic and environmental costs.
13. The ability of parents to explain PSHE to their children as they develop is inevitably variable, given its sensitivity, complexity and necessity of teaching to be varied and maintained as the child develops. Parents have not been trained to do this and there are fundamental reasons why sexuality is a problematic topic between close relatives.
14. If it is not statutory, schools will be incentivised to focus effort and attention on subjects leading to good exam performance.
15. If it is not statutory, the increasing diversity in cultural and religious backgrounds can become an excuse for the neglect of best practice in PSHE.
16. Increasing diversity in cultural and religious backgrounds makes it more important that a common basis is taught for sexual and gender relationships within a modern democratic society.
17. The quality of PSHE is widely accepted to be variable; making it statutory would improve standards.

Addressing objections to making PSHE statutory

18. It may be argued that PSHE is a matter for parents. However, as shown above, parents are typically ill-equipped to deliver PSHE on their own. Moreover, the costs of poor PSHE fall on society as much as on the parents.
19. It may be argued that PSHE exposes children to explicit sexual information at too early an age. However, children today are exposed to an extremely wide range of sexual material from the internet via their peers. It is more important than ever that sexual misinformation is countered.
20. It may be argued that religious or cultural traditions should dictate sexual and relationship education. While there should be the right to provide religious instruction, individual children should also be fully educated using best practice in this important area of personal rights and life skills.

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

No response made

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

No response made

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

No response made

How the effectiveness of SRE should be measured.

21. The following measures seem appropriate:

- OFSTED inspections
- surveying of pupils on their satisfaction with SRE
- surveying of relevant healthcare professionals on their perception of the effectiveness of SRE
- the level of teenage pregnancies
- the level of sexually transmitted diseases.

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