

Key findings

Teacher's survey on sex and relationships education



Briefing Paper 2008

Introduction

Teachers use common sense in teaching SRE but sometimes knowing exactly what should be taught would be helpful!
(Teacher, SEF survey, 2008)

This briefing is a summary of the key findings of an online survey designed to find out from teachers who deliver sex and relationships education (SRE) their perception of how SRE is taught in their school, their experience of training, and what action is needed at national and local level to improve personal, social and health education (PSHE).

This self-selected survey received 528 responses from SRE teachers (37 per cent primary, 55 per cent secondary) from a mixture of mainstream, special, faith and non-faith schools. The results shed light on some of the barriers teachers experience, their views on how SRE can be improved and confirm what we already know from previous surveys and anecdotal evidence.

Status of SRE

It is, in my opinion, highly inappropriate that the government state that all children should have access to good quality PSHE and SRE, yet do not make it a compulsory subject. By doing this they lower the status of PSHE and put immense pressure on schools to deliver this with no support at national level.
(Teacher, SEF survey, 2008)

Since September 2008 all schools have a legal duty to promote their pupils' well-being. Almost all teachers (98 per cent) agreed that SRE makes an important contribution to this duty.

There was strong consensus (95 per cent) that PSHE (including SRE) is as important a subject as the statutory national curriculum subjects. The majority (94 per cent) agreed that more should be done at a national level to raise its status and 9 out of 10 respondents (89 per cent) agreed PSHE (including SRE) should be a statutory national curriculum subject. Nine out of 10 respondents (88 per cent) agreed that this entitlement should extend to all 16- to 19-year-olds in further education.

The qualitative responses indicated that teachers would find it helpful if efforts were made nationally to raise awareness of the importance of SRE.

Need for practical guidance

... [what would improve SRE in my school] ... NOT just seeing SRE as something which deals with contraception and STIs. More of the emotional and social impacts of sexual health, well-being and happiness. (Teacher, SEF survey, 2008)

The majority of teachers (80 per cent) wanted more guidance, but it was clear the focus should be on practice rather than policy, including lesson plans, how to teach the potentially 'sensitive' topics and how to involve young people in developing the SRE curriculum.

More emphasis is needed on the emotional, social and relationships aspects of SRE; the majority of both primary and secondary teachers agreed that the biological side of puberty and reproduction were relatively well covered.

Respondents were provided a list of 19 SRE topics (see appendix 1). The top four topics on which teachers requested more information included:

For primary:

- different sexualities, including gay, straight, lesbian and transgender
- influences from family, community and religion on sex and relationships
- the emotional aspects of puberty
- different types of relationships – between men and women and people of the same sex.

For secondary:

- different sexualities, including gay, straight lesbian and transgender
- skills for coping with relationships
- making decisions about sexual activity, including how to know when you are ready
- influences from the family, community and religion on sex and relationships.

Over two-thirds (66 per cent) of schools teach SRE as part of PSHE, which is in line with recommended practice. This highlights the need for guidance that makes links between SRE and PSHE/PSHE Education.

Barriers to delivering good quality SRE

Without it being statutory, with the pressure of league tables and results, PSHE/SRE is simply not valued or given the time on the timetable by either the senior management or the staff. (Teacher, SEF survey, 2008)

There is a mixed picture regarding the barriers to the teaching of good quality SRE. This highlights the inconsistency between schools and the variety of challenges teachers experience.

Barriers included:

- not enough time in the curriculum to deliver SRE (44 per cent agreed)
- confusion in their school about what should and should not be taught in SRE (24 per cent agreed)
- not enough teachers in their school who are willing to teach SRE (32 per cent agreed)
- their schools' current SRE policy (13 per cent).

Less than a quarter of teachers (22 per cent) reported that concerns about negative reactions from parents prevented their school from providing the SRE that young people need.

Need for training

Many staff feel uncomfortable when teaching whilst others are fine with it, this means that provision is mixed. All pupils get the bare essentials but there are others who receive a more detailed approach ... depending on the teacher that is delivering the work. (Teacher, SEF survey, 2008)

When asked what one change in their school would most improve the quality of SRE, 'more teacher training' was the most common response. Furthermore the majority (67 per cent) agreed that more training is needed for senior managers and governors so they can support the provision of SRE in their schools.

Role of Initial Teacher Training

... we had one hour in a four-year course and it was a lecture with no chance to discuss issues or concerns. (Teacher, SEF survey, 2008)

Very few teachers (3 per cent) reported that SRE was covered adequately within their Initial Teacher Training (ITT). The majority (90 per cent and 91 per cent respectively) agreed that trainee teachers should have the option to train as specialists in PSHE (including SRE), and that all trainee teachers should take a compulsory module in PSHE (including SRE) as part of ITT.

Currently some teachers do access training, but from a variety of sources and of varying quality. This highlights the inconsistency in the training that is available.

Role of the PSHE Continued Professional Development (CPD) Programme

I have used it to gain a higher profile for my department and also to encourage other staff to participate. (Teacher, SEF survey, 2008)

More than a quarter of the teachers (28.5 per cent) reported that they had completed the National PSHE CPD Programme. This appears to be having an impact on SRE provision, with the majority of those who completed the CPD Programme reporting some improvement in the SRE they deliver (92 per cent). The majority also felt that it had contributed to improvements in the quality of SRE across the whole school.

However, almost three-quarters (71.5 per cent) reported that they had not completed the Programme. Time and funding were the two most quoted reasons for this.

Role of National Healthy Schools Programme

The best thing is for Healthy Schools teams to be proactive in support and resourcing SRE in schools. This needs to be joined up with other young people's services to ensure adequate targeting of vulnerable young people. (Teacher, SEF survey, 2008)

For the majority of schools the National Healthy Schools Programme has been an important lever to improve SRE. However, a quarter of primary and a third of secondary schools have seen no improvement in SRE as a result of Healthy Schools Status.

Use of outside visitors

... [we need] Input from outside agencies at no financial cost, including the school nurse being able to commit to sessions. (Teacher, SEF survey, 2008)

Many schools rely on the support of outside agencies to deliver SRE. Only 20 per cent reported that SRE was taught by teachers alone, and the majority (73 per cent) responded that SRE is taught by a mixture of teachers, outside visitors and school support staff. However, this survey did not find out

who the outside visitors were, what their qualifications were or their relationship with the school. This, in turn, would be expected to have an impact on the quality of SRE provided.

The Sex Education Forum

This survey, which was developed by the Sex Education Forum with the PSHE Association, was commissioned by the DCSF as part of the review of SRE in schools.

The Sex Education Forum is the national authority on sex and relationships education (SRE). It works together with its diverse membership to ensure quality SRE.

Its objectives include to keep children and young people's entitlement to SRE on the policy agenda and to share information and build capacity amongst professionals.

For more information on SRE and related topics, visit our website: www.ncb.org.uk/sef

Or contact our Information service: sexedforum@ncb.org.uk, 020 7843 1901

SEF's newest publications include:

Sex Education Forum (2008) *Key findings. Young people survey on sex and relationships education*. London: NCB

Sex Education Forum (2008) *We Want More: What young people want from sex and relationships education. Charter for change*. London: SEF/NCB.

Martinez A and de Meza L (2008) *Are you Getting it Right? A toolkit for consulting young people on sex and relationships education*. London: SEF/NCB.

The PSHE Association

The PSHE Association aims to raise the status, quality and impact of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) for learners in the 21st century. It is committed to helping teachers and other professionals to better plan, manage, deliver, evaluate and monitor PSHE.

For more information and details of membership visit www.pshe-association.org.uk, email info@pshe-association.org.uk or call 020 7843 1916.

Useful websites

National PSHE CPD programme www.pshe-cpd.com

National Healthy Schools Programme www.healthyschools.gov.uk

Appendix 1

List of 19 topics

Topic

- How our bodies change as we grow up and in puberty
- Our feelings and emotions when we are growing up
- The feelings and emotions that we experience in relationships and sex
- The biological things about sex and reproduction (including how our bodies and sexual organs work)
- Different types of relationships and families
- Understanding what is good and bad in a relationship
- Skills for coping with relationships
- Dealing with pressure from friends and other young people
- Making decisions about having sex and knowing if you are ready
- Sexual identities, including gay, straight, lesbian, bisexual and transgender
- Contraception
- All the choices you have if you get pregnant (including abortion, adoption and parenting)
- HIV and AIDS
- Sexually transmitted infections
- Where you can go if you need help with sex and relationship problems
- The enjoyable and good things about sex
- Messages from the media about sex and relationships (both good and bad)
- Influences from family, community and religion about sex and relationships
- The law about sex, including the age of consent, abuse, violence and rape



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