

HEALTHY, HAPPY, SAFE?

AN INVESTIGATION INTO HOW
PSHE AND SRE ARE INSPECTED
IN ENGLISH SCHOOLS

Executive summary

The BHA, like so many other groups and individuals, has long been committed to comprehensive, age-appropriate personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE) and its component, sex and relationships education (SRE), in English schools. We have campaigned for it for over six decades but today the evidence is unequivocal. Good-quality PSHE and SRE substantially improves outcomes for young people in terms of delaying the first time they have sex, ensuring that when they do it is safe and consensual, driving down the number of teenage or unwanted pregnancies, halting the spread of sexually transmitted infections, preventing homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying, tackling alcoholism and drug abuse, mitigating the risks posed by the internet and modern technology, and reforming discriminatory attitudes towards women and girls.¹

Despite these benefits, not to mention a substantial and growing consensus on the need for statutory status, PSHE is still not compulsory. Faced by this consensus, the Government's main response for years now has been to emphasise the role of Ofsted in ensuring that, despite not being obliged to, schools do nonetheless teach PSHE. In November 2015, for example, Home Office Minister Lord Bates stated in response to a question on making PSHE statutory that 'we expect sex and relationships education be taught in all schools. In fact, it is inspected by Ofsted as such.'² In February 2016 former Education Spokesperson Baroness Evans stated that: 'Ofsted inspects all schools...so this enables PSHE to be considered in a proportionate and integrated way as part of their inspection'.³

And in January 2017 the Schools Minister Nick Gibb MP, responding to a question on the need for PSHE in schools, said that 'as part of an inspection, Ofsted will consider whether the school is providing a broad and balanced curriculum that meets the needs of pupils and prepares them for adult life'.⁴

Ofsted, too, have accepted this role. When the latest inspection framework was introduced in September 2015, the then Ofsted lead inspector on PSHE stated that 'it is clear from the range of inspection guidance for September 2015 that the evidence schools provide regarding the effectiveness of their PSHE and of pupils' SMSC development is more crucial than ever to informing the judgements inspectors make'.⁵

This report, however, which details the results of an analysis of inspections conducted during the 2015/2016 academic year, since the new common inspection framework (and its greater focus on personal development and welfare of pupils) was introduced, finds that these positive statements of intent have yet to filter through to inspections. Indeed, it suggests that they have yet to filter through to schools' delivery of PSHE too.

The report's main findings are as follows:

- SRE was explicitly mentioned in fewer than 1% of reports across both primary and secondary, while PSHE was mentioned in just 14% of all, and only 8% of primary school reports. Both were mentioned in fewer reports than almost every other established subject, including history (36%), geography (26%), art (31%), music (31%) and sport (59%)
- Homophobic, biphobic, and transphobic bullying (HBT) was addressed in 14% of reports, and very few of these dealt with trans issues specifically. This is despite a 2016 survey finding that 86% of secondary teachers had identified homophobic bullying in their schools⁹, and significant focus from Ofsted on tackling HBT bullying
- References to LGBT-related issues of any kind were found in only 14% of reports
- 'Sexting' was mentioned in just 17 reports, despite having been recently and repeatedly identified as a major area of concern by the Government
- Pornography, online or otherwise, was mentioned in just a single report
- Only 1% of reports mentioned issues related to gender such as gender discrimination, gender stereotyping, or sexism. There were no mentions of sexual harassment or sexual violence
- Mentions of sexual health and safe sex were almost entirely absent from inspectors' reports, with only 1% of reports referring to these issues
- There was only one mention of HIV/AIDS in all the reports. It referred to content on 'emerging economies' in a 'geography lesson'
- Fewer than 1% of reports criticised a school's coverage of PSHE and SRE in any way. This flies in the face of Ofsted's 2013 report into PSHE – which found that the subject's provision is 'not yet good enough' in 40% of schools. Unfortunately, therefore, it seems that Ofsted is routinely failing to pick schools up on their shortcomings.

Summary of recommendations

Statutory PSHE, including SRE

It is clear that PSHE and SRE are not being taught to anywhere near the extent they ought to be in schools, and all the evidence suggests that where they are taught, important content is often overlooked.

But it is also clear that even with its new beefed-up framework, Ofsted alone cannot be relied upon to deal with this. Unless PSHE is placed on a statutory footing and

schools are statutorily obliged to teach the subject, provision will continue to reflect this 'afterthought' status. All the other problems that flow from this – a shortage of trained teachers, insufficient time to cover the range of content, lack of assessment opportunities to gauge pupil progress – will go unresolved. This is not to say that statutory status can necessarily cure all of the subject's current ills, but without it very few meaningful improvements can be made.

Update the SRE guidance

The Government's official guidance on SRE in schools was published in 2000 and is now 17 years old.⁷ Given how much has changed in the lives of young people – in school, at home, in society more broadly, and online – the SRE guidance is badly out of date. Clearer, more comprehensive, more inclusive, and more relevant guidance must be produced especially if PSHE and SRE are not made compulsory.

Inspection framework and handbook to include specific mention of PSHE and SRE

Whilst, as this report notes, the Ofsted inspection framework and the handbook for inspectors have been strengthened in the emphasis they place on safeguarding and personal development, behaviour, and welfare, this has not translated into PSHE being given the attention it deserves in Ofsted inspections and reports. Ofsted various guidance documents should be amended so as to advise schools explicitly that the teaching of content ordinarily covered as part of PSHE and SRE is central to good or outstanding performance in terms of the personal development, behaviour, and welfare of pupils.

Re-introduce subject-specific inspections on PSHE

Ofsted's two previous subject-specific reports on PSHE, published in 2007 and 2013 and detailed below, provided valuable insights into the state of PSHE and SRE in English schools. They were both the product of survey visits carried out by inspectors specifically to assess the quality of PSHE education, without which the reports could not have been produced. These subject-specific inspections were brought to an end for all subjects in 2013/14, and we have therefore lost an important means of evaluating PSHE provision across the system. Similarly, as of 2015, Ofsted no longer publishes reports detailing examples of good practice in schools. Ofsted should resume both survey visits and the publication of good practice reports immediately.