Introduction and background

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is an established but non-statutory school subject which supports pupils to be safe, healthy and prepared for modern life. The PSHE education curriculum covers a range of key issues facing children and young people today, including those relating to relationships, mental and physical health, staying safe and aware online, financial literacy and careers. However, the non-statutory nature of PHSE threatens consistency of standards and curriculum time. Ofsted estimates that up to 40 per cent of schools’ PSHE is ‘not yet good enough’ and DfE figures show a decline of over 30 per cent in curriculum time for the subject in secondary schools since 2011. The March 2018 Teacher Voice Omnibus survey statistics suggest that 6 per cent of schools teach no PSHE or relationships and sex education (RSE). Independent schools have more of a commitment to delivering PSHE than state schools despite disadvantaged pupils seeing the greatest benefit.

This report from the PHSE strategic partners (a group comprising national organisations with strategic responsibilities related to PSHE) aims to show how statutory PSHE as an entire subject, including relationships and sex education (RSE), can bring significant benefits without having a significant impact on teacher workload and school funding. The report argues that making PSHE education statutory would improve the lives of children and young people and be popular in the teaching community. It would also be the most effective and efficient way to deliver existing commitments to statutory RSE, since most schools already teach these subjects together.

Key points

Workload and timetabling

- Making PSHE education statutory would, in most cases, involve building on existing provision and making it more consistent, rather than setting something up from scratch.

- Teachers and school leaders clearly consider PSHE education as ‘meaningful’ workload, recognising its benefits for pupils and school culture. For this reason, 90 per cent of National Association of Headteachers (NAHT) members think that it should be statutory and 91 per cent of National Education Union (NEU) members agree that it should have a regular place in the curriculum.

- Good schools see PSHE as a benefit. Statutory status would show clearly that the government shares this view and that it expects all schools to provide a high quality personal, social, health and economic education.

- One of the PHSE strategic partners, Pro Bono Economics, conducted a major evidence review into the links between academic attainment, behaviour and PHSE. It reported that research indicates that classroom based PSHE type education delivering behaviour programmes (e.g. targeting reduced negative behaviour and promoting pro social behaviour) has a positive impact on behavioural outcomes and, in turn, academic attainment.

- Schools are currently considering how best to approach implementation of statutory RSE from 2019. Making PSHE statutory in its entirety – including but not limited to RSE – would be more efficient than committing to compulsory RSE alone. Most schools are already delivering RSE as part of the PHSE curriculum.

- Leading child safety bodies and experts, including organisations in the PSHE education Strategic Partners Group, also recommend statutory PSHE as the most effective way of implementing government commitments to RSE in all schools from 2019.

- It is important to provide a ‘spiral’ programme of knowledge, skills and attribute development within the PHSE curriculum, where prior learning is revisited at different stages and in different contexts. Statutory status would help ensure that schools provide a coherent curriculum of PSHE rather than ad-hoc, standalone interventions.

- In terms of workload reduction there is a wide range of resources to help teachers to plan PHSE curricula. These include planning tools such as the PSHE Association’s Programme of Study and planning toolkits, guidance from the Sex Education Forum, and individual lesson plans from national organisations such as the British Heart Foundation and NSPCC, and from government initiatives such as the Home Office’s Disrespect NoBody.

Value for money

- Recent surveys show that some teachers lack confidence with the delivery of PHSE. Fifty-one per cent of
respondents to the Teacher Voice survey said they would need CPD training and examples of good practice to implement statutory PSHE. In a recent NEU poll, a higher number of respondents cited insufficient training rather than workload as a concern to implementation of high quality PSHE.

- The training and CPD necessary to address these concerns does not have to be prohibitively expensive and many schools are doing a good job without excessive cost. Training given to a PHSE lead can be cascaded to colleagues, thereby rendering it cost effective.

- At both primary and secondary level, there should be a PHSE lead who is trained for the role. At primary level, all teachers should receive some basic training in PHSE and at secondary level, all teachers delivering the subject should be trained.

- PSHE should be included in initial teacher training (ITT) to reduce the CPD burden on schools. As most teachers will be required to teach PSHE education at some point in their career, they need a grasp of the basics, as the alternative can have a negative impact on pupil safety and teacher morale. Ofsted commented in the 2013 report, ‘Not yet good enough’ that ‘all initial teacher training courses include subject-specific PSHE education training’. Ofsted also say that schools should ‘ensure that staff teaching PSHE education receive subject-specific training and regular updates, including in the teaching of sensitive issues’.

- Statutory status would help to create a career pathway for PSHE leads, which would, in turn, increase the consistency of provision. Specialising in RSE alone is not such a viable career path for teachers. Teacher training providers see a market for PSHE education as a specialism in the event of it being make statutory, but they do not see RSE specialism in isolation in the same way.

- The government’s aims to ensure that young people are protected from the dangers of the internet, and that their wellbeing is looked after, are closely linked to the delivery of PHSE. Statutory provision of PHSE would provide a long-term solution compared to alternatives such as public awareness campaigns or one-off interventions.

PHSE: benefits for pupils

- There is robust evidence of the links between PHSE and academic performance; disadvantaged pupils see the greatest benefits. Many schools which perform very well academically also have high quality PSHE provision. Ofsted noted the correlation between ‘outstanding’ schools and schools that provide outstanding PSHE in a recent blog post.

- The Hatton Academies Trust exemplifies the role of PHSE in Ofsted success. Victoria Bishop, the CEO, states that: “Students value these lessons and their effectiveness is a key reason for our caring ethos and in producing our tolerant and respectful academy community as shown by our Outstanding status and full staff involvement in the programme . . .”.

- Statutory PHSE would ensure curriculum time for these knowledge-based areas such as careers which prepare young people for the world of work and for their lives as members of society.

Examples of effective PHSE

- The PHSE curriculum is supported by a range of partner organisations. The British Red Cross, British Heart Foundation and St John Ambulance (the Every Child a Lifesaver coalition) advocate the provision of first aid education including cardiopulmonary resuscitation (CPR) as a mandatory component of a new, statutory PSHE curriculum. To this end, they provide a number of resources, including the St John’s Ambulance Big First Aid lesson and the curriculum support guide from the Red Cross.

- Developing an understanding of personal finance within PSHE can support other subject areas, such as maths, in applying real life contexts for students. Young Money (part of Young Enterprise) has developed a range of financial education programmes which can be included in the PHSE curriculum. Young Money hears from teachers across the country who have seen their pupils benefit from financial education. Stuart Brooks, Year 6 teacher and Head of Maths at Centre of Excellence Mount Wise Community Primary School, links teaching maths in a financial context to improved academic results. The proportion of pupils reaching the expected standard for maths has increased from 73 per cent in 2015-16 to 92 per cent in 2016-17 and the percentage of higher attainers has increased from 23 per cent to 32 per cent.

- A case study from Sir Christopher Hatton Academy in Wellingborough shows how a coherent PHSE programme has enhanced the wellbeing and attainment of pupils. A recently updated Skills for Work programme at the school delivers lessons which explicitly address attitudes to gender and body image, linking these to careers education in STEM subjects. In years 7 and 8 there is a focus on the big transitions from KS2 to KS3. Mental health and well-being is integrated across the programme as well as aspects of Skills for Work in every year group.

- For Post-16 students, the school offers a ‘Careers and Preparation for the World of Work programme’. This is a bespoke package made up of visiting speakers, taught lessons, interactive and on-line activities: trips, visits and active participation. The school works with the Director of Sixth form, Careers lead teacher and the Lead for Enterprise (Skills for Work) to ensure that there are programmes addressing university applications, apprenticeships and the full range of opportunities available. Seventy-three per cent of the school’s students progress to higher education.

- The school has an hour dedicated to PHSE on Thursday morning across the whole academy. Staff deliver to all year groups: in year 7 and 8 form tutors deliver the programme to their own form groups and in years 9, 10 and 11 they work on a carousel so that form staff will deliver the same session to each form group. They opt for which units they would like to teach.

The full document can be downloaded from: https://www.psheassociation.org.uk/system/files/PSHE%20workload%20report%20FiNAL%20version%204%206%202018.pdf

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