Review

A Framework for PSHE (including elements of Citizenship)

All Oxfordshire secondary schools were sent this document during the recent summer holidays. The discovery of the document on their desks was, no doubt, well received, and, through the established network meetings across Oxfordshire, will undergo further exploration and expansion.

Its appeal to the author stems from its relevance to current educational initiatives, that is by providing a operational framework for the implementation of the non-statutory guidelines for PSHE as well as contributing to the statutory Citizenship programme at Key Stages 3 & 4. Its approach, through a summary of the key issues, is to provide a flexible scheme of work across the two key stages which incorporates both continuity and progression of the PSHE curriculum.

In the foreword, Mr. R. Howard (Principal Adviser, Oxfordshire County Council Education) pertinently reminds us that the delivery of the PSHE programme...

Many schools by their own admission face an uphill struggle if they are to improve sex education.

A Framework for PSHE (including elements of Citizenship)
Oxfordshire County Council June 2000. 39 pages.
Produced by Glynie Hendra, Advisory Teacher for PSHE (in consultation with Gill Powis, PSHE Adviser)
Copies are available free:
Oxfordshire County Council Education Service
Advisory & Inspection Service
Oxton Road Centre, Oxford Road, Oxford OX4 3DY

New Sex Education Resources from fpa

The Family Planning Association has long produced excellent sex education resources for schools - and now there are more great choices to help you.

Abortion: just so you know
This brand new booklet is the latest in our best-selling series for young people. It was specially tested in schools and provides accurate information about abortion, meeting the requirements in the DfES’s new Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) guidance to “teach young people the opportunity to explore the dilemmas, enable them to know and understand about abortion, and develop the communication skills to discuss it with parents and health professionals.”

The Weird & Wonderful World of Billy Ballantrarity
This new video takes a teenage boy’s view of puberty and sexual health. Filmed in Northern Ireland, it follows the likable Billy through a day in his life. It also includes young people talking about their own experiences and comes with a comprehensive training manual containing exercises on issues raised in the video.

Talking to your kids about sex
The new SRE Guidance strongly encourages schools to work in partnership with parents on sex education. Our new video, “ Talking to your kids about sex,” can be used by anyone introducing the subject to parents and was launched by the government’s Teenage

Pregnancy Unit. It supports parents in their role as sex educators to overcome embarrassment and talk openly and honestly with their children about puberty and growing up.

James Lawrence was AVERT's information officer, responsible for this research, and, Annabel Kanabus is the Director of AVERT

Sex Education Provision in Secondary Schools

With high teenage pregnancy rates and mounting evidence showing that young people now rely on teachers rather than their parents for their sex information the government has started to move positively to improve sex education.

To find out what teachers actually think of sex education provision, AIDS Education and Research Trust (AVERT) commissioned the Schools Health Education Unit to carry out a postal survey of 300 Health Education co-ordinators in schools, inviting them to return a copy of their sex education policies along with their completed questionnaires.

This yielded 105 responses from the 334 schools approached, 26 of which participated in a follow-up telephone survey.

Topics Covered

Of the schools that responded, an impressive 97% cover Sexually Transmitted Diseases, and 78% cover homosexuality. However, only 83% of schools cover safer sex, 9% lower than those covering HIV transmission.

Similarly there is a worrying mismatch between those teaching safer sex (88%) and those equipping young people with essential skills to put this knowledge into action such as keeping safe and resisting pressure (76%) and decision-making and personal choice (74%).

Whilst 96% include contraception and family planning in their sex education, talking about sexual topics (72%) and negotiating about relationships (67%) are less well covered, a situation that has worrying implications for young people.

When asked to grade their level of coverage of topics in sex education, it became obvious that many schools by their own admission face an uphill struggle if they are to improve sex education.

For example, only 52% consider that they give full coverage to accessing and using sexual health services/registration services that will prove vital in reducing the number of teenage pregnancies and STIs.

Similar essential life skills also receive less attention in the classroom, with decision-making, negotiating about relationships and talking about sexual topics all receiving low ‘considerable coverage’ scores: 51%, 31% and 45% respectively.

Actual discussion of ‘love-making’, arguably the most relevant part of sex education as it actually covers sex, scored equally lowly, with just 45% of schools reporting considerable coverage.

Biology vs Emotions

By comparison, however, there are subjects that receive much better treatment; puberty, parts of the body and contraception (83%, 79% and 77% respectively).

At first glance it would be tempting to attribute this to a division between those subjects that are ‘easy’ to teach as they have a biological focus and those subjects that can be more contentious as they have an emotional focus.

However, comments received during the telephone follow-up suggest that there are more complex factors contributing to this situation.
Also, such a division cannot account for the mere 43% of schools who feel they address the topic of sex and the law in good detail. Given that 14% of schools reported not covering the topic at any point in any year, one wonders how exactly young people are expected to make informed choices about their lives with a lack of such basic information.

Age appropriate

Timing is also a crucial element in sex education. If one starts from the premise that sex education needs to be age appropriate, thereby giving young people the information they need in order to make informed decisions, it would seem sensible that basic education around puberty be delivered prior to girls experiencing menarche.

It has been widely accepted for some time that the average age of puberty for girls is 12-13, and it is unsurprising to find 84% of schools covering puberty in Year 7.

However, a significant number of schools are revisiting puberty in Year 9, with one school addressing the topic for the first time, two years after the average age of menarche and useless for girls who started puberty aged 8.

Organisations such as AVERT are increasingly aware of such instances, where girls are left open to trauma unaware of why they are bleeding.

Influencing factors

If sex education provision is to improve, then we need to establish what is currently limiting schools from providing an ideal curriculum.

When asked, the schools rated ‘teacher confidence/commitment’ (91%), ‘supplementary resource’ (94%), ‘planning time’ (86%) and ‘INSET’ (63%) and ‘TTT’ (59%) as being amongst the most influential factors upon sex education.

Yet when asked how satisfied the schools were with these factors in relation to their provision of sex education, a different picture emerged.

Whilst 84% were either satisfied or very satisfied with their resources, 51% of schools reported being unhappy with their TTT and 45% were unsatisfied with their INSET.

Strangely though, this appears to have had little bearing upon their confidence or commitment, with just 4% unsatisfied with this.

However, in contradiction to the long-held belief that teachers are mostly constrained by time allocation on the timetable, only 13% reported that they were unsatisfied with the time allotted in their school for sex education.

This however is open to interpretation, given the responses to the depth of the sex education currently provided. Many schools’ apparent reluctance to broach the more contentious topics in the questionnaire, with their pupils, one has to ask whether insufficient training combined with time constraints is responsible for some teachers remaining with revisiting basic topics.

Non-statutory subject

Alternatively it could be argued that teachers are currently maximising their time with young people, ensuring that they have a solid knowledge base.

However, if it becomes essential for teachers to move beyond this base, then time pressures will become more acute and the number of teachers unsatisfied with the time allotted will inevitably rise.

With sex education remaining a non-statutory subject, it seems unlikely that this situation will improve much, when one takes into account mounting pressures on the timetable.

Telephone survey

When asked directly in the telephone survey if they had any additional concerns, the following points were raised.

Nearly half of those interviewed had had difficulty in treating sex in a positive way, for fear they were perceived as encouraging under-age sex.

Other schools reported that they were more concerned about the quality of provision in their feeder primary schools, than in their own.

Finally, when asked whether sex education could be said to be too little, too late and too historical’ in their schools, the majority (65%) disagreed, saying that whilst it may previously have been true or may apply elsewhere, it was not the case in their school.

Since this research was completed, schools have been given new guidance on sex and relationships education from the DfEE. We welcome the fact that there is guidance and were pleased to be invited to comment on it, but we are afraid that the final document leaves something to be desired.

Despite its length, the document is still not clear enough, and is in some places contradictory. Teachers may still struggle to make and implement clear policy.

While the number of schools involved in this survey only provides us with a snapshot on the current provision of sex education, at the very least this gives us some indication of where the main problem areas may be.

Steve Flood is Editor of Young Minds Magazine which is published every two months. Subscriptions cost £25 per annum (6 issues). YoungMinds is a unique national charity working to promote the mental health of children and young people.

Tel: 077 7136 4445
Fax: 020 7359 8448
Email: magazine@youngminds.org.uk
Web: www.youngminds.org.uk

This article, kindly reprinted from YoungMinds Magazine shows the results from three research reports which support the view that drug misuse among young people may well have peaked.

Steve Flood

Drug misuse among the young may have peaked

Levels of drug misuse among young people may well have peaked, latest Government figures suggest, a finding which Ministers will be keen to interpret as an early sign that Drugs Czar Keith Hellawell’s ten year strategy to reduce drug misuse is on course to succeed.

A national survey of levels of drugs, alcohol and tobacco use among more than 9,000 11-15 year olds in England, has found that cigarette smoking fell between 1998 and 1999, use of illegal drugs increased only marginally, and alcohol consumption remained the same.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) survey which was commissioned by the Department of Health, found no increase from the previous year in the numbers of 11-15 year olds who admitted to having used illegal drugs in the month preceding the survey - 1 in 14 young people said they had done so.

There had been a slight increase (from 11 to 12%) of those who said they had used drugs at any time during the previous 12 months, but the increase was not statistically significant.

However, ONS says there was a significant rise - from 13 to 15 per cent - of those who had used drugs at some point in their lives.

Among both boys and girls, the survey found marked variation according to age. Only one in a hundred 11 year olds said they had used drugs in the last year, but nearly a third of 15 year olds (30 per cent) had done so. Boys were slightly more likely than girls to have used drugs within the previous 12 months (33%, compared with 23%).

Not surprisingly, cannabis is by far the most popular illegal drug - 11 per cent of pupils said they had used it during the previous year. The next most commonly used substances - glue, gas and poppers - had each been used by only 1 in 50 young people.

However, many more young people said they had been offered drugs than had tried them, with over a third having been offered at least one type of drug. Boys were more likely to have been offered drugs than girls (56% compared to 33%).

While cannabis was the drug which young people said they were most likely to have been offered, 16 per cent said they had been offered stimulants (a group which includes cocaine, crack, ecstasy and amphetamines), and five per cent had been approached with offers of heroin or methadone.

The ONS survey is broadly in line with findings published earlier in the year by the Schools Health Education Unit (SHEU), which produced an annual analysis of young people’s illegal drug use since 1987, based on the Unit’s Teenage Related Behaviour Questionnaire.

According to the SHEU research, the percentage of young people who have tried an illegal drug peaked in 1995-96, and may have even come down since then. The SHEU’s latest survey found that 21 per cent of today’s 14 - 15 year olds said they had tried an illegal drug at some point in their lives.

However, the SHEU study also supports the ONS survey’s finding that many more young people have been offered drugs. It found that nearly 4 out of 10 14 - 15 year olds (39%) knew where to get hold of illegal drugs, 58 per cent knew a drug user and 44 per cent had been