

Barnardo's Scotland and NSPCC Scotland joint briefing: Equalities & Human Rights Committee debate on Prejudice-based Bullying & Harassment of Children & Young People in Schools and Review of Personal & Social Education

- **All children and young people should have access to high quality, comprehensive education around health and wellbeing across all education settings;**
- **It is vital that improved dedicated lessons in PSE/health and wellbeing are supported by a whole-school approach to the health and wellbeing of children and young people.**
- **Health and wellbeing must have parity of esteem with literacy and numeracy in practice – consideration should be given to effective scrutiny and whether crucial elements should be prescribed to ensure consistency and quality.**

We welcome this debate and congratulate both Committees for focussing their attention on two such important and cross-cutting issues. Lessons about health and wellbeing, including PSE, should teach children and young people about healthy relationships, respect for one another, and help build resilience, emotional literacy and coping strategies. Many children and young people face difficulties with bullying and with their mental health and wellbeing. It is essential we equip children and young people with the skills to cope with adversity as well as developing a culture of respect between peers to reduce the prevalence of bullying within our schools.

Along with literacy and numeracy, health and wellbeing is one of the three core areas of the curriculum that falls under the responsibility of all school staff. As part of 'Responsibility of All' everyone who works in a school has a responsibility to support the mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing of pupils. This is to be commended; however we remain concerned that this laudable vision is not being reflected in practice across Scotland.

The Children and Young People's Participation Programme for Equally Safe identified improving education's approach and response to gender based violence and gender equality as the overarching priority for children and young people, with recommendations relevant to bullying and health and wellbeing/PSE from nursery through to secondary school.¹ We would recommend that Government consider the recommendations from these young advisers in relation to a wide range of policy areas, including PSE and bullying.

We therefore welcome the National Review of PSE being undertaken by Education Scotland as a potential impetus to improve this aspect of health and wellbeing education. We also welcome the SAMH 'Going to Be' campaign and the Healthy Minds campaign by the Scottish Young Greens which is calling for quality mental health education in schools.

¹ Initial findings have been presented to the Cabinet Secretary for Communities, Social Security and Equalities; the full report is in preparation.

It is unclear what the reality across schools in Scotland is of PSE and its elements such as RSHPE, its delivery; its content or quality; how confident teachers feel in delivering it; or, importantly, what children and young people need and want to talk about.

The Scottish Government's Review of PSE is an important opportunity to address the inconsistencies which have been highlighted in the current and previous inquiries by Scottish Parliament Committees. We request that the review considers the following:

- **PSE is not just about teenagers, it relates to the whole of childhood and the whole of the curriculum** – The extension of early years education and childcare should be utilized to develop age appropriate health and wellbeing content in the nursery curriculum that promotes healthy, respectful relationships, builds resilience and equips children with positive coping mechanisms. This early work should continue into primary and secondary schools, evolving and adapting with children's age and stage.
- **It is vital not only that improved PSE is delivered in classrooms, but that it is supported by a whole-school approach** which creates safe and inclusive environments for children. PSE lessons do not exist in isolation from the rest of schooling – a school may be able to provide outstanding PSE lessons around sexting and online behaviour, but also needs to have clear policies to respond to individual incidents effectively. PSE should play a role in making sure that schools adopt a 'no wrong door approach' to children's mental health and wellbeing. We would be interested in the national picture of how provision in PSE lessons is supported by wider school structures and policies.
- **We believe national leadership is necessary to ensure consistency and support in schools**, particularly in relation to the specific Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education (RSHPE) guidance. There continue to be concerns about the consistency of provision of high quality, age appropriate RSHPE across Scotland – for example whether provision covers primary and secondary levels, reaches children disengaged from schooling, and covers the range of relevant topics such as emotional literacy, consent and health relationships, parenthood, attitudes towards gender equality, and gendered abuse. Worryingly, recent research by the TIE campaign highlighted that only 9% of teachers who responded felt the RSHPE guidance was extensive enough, 34% hadn't read it and 21% didn't know what it was.
- **Health and wellbeing must be given parity of esteem with literacy and numeracy in practice.** The delivery of PSE appears inconsistent across Scotland and more clarity is required around what our expectations are around this vital aspect of the health and wellbeing curriculum. There is a difference between making PSE mandatory and making PSE prescriptive. We would highlight the importance of on-going scrutiny and inspection of what we're achieving through PSE, and whether this is currently being achieved or worked towards through the health and wellbeing strand of the National Improvement Framework.

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