

## **Parenting UK response to the consultation on the PSHE review**

November 2011

*The Department for Education is currently undertaking an internal review of personal, social and health education (PSHE) as outlined in the Schools White Paper.*

*After the review of PSHE education, the Secretary of State will publish proposals for public consultation, "The aim of the review is to consider the essential knowledge and awareness that pupils need to be taught, so that they understand the world around them, and are able to manage their lives, now and in the future."*

The consultation opened on 21 July 2011 and closed on 30 November 2011. You can see the document here <http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations/index.cfm>

This consultation response has been coordinated by Parenting UK's Communications Team. For more information please contact [info@parentinguk.org](mailto:info@parentinguk.org)

### **Responses to specific consultation questions**

**Question 1.** *What do you consider the core outcomes PSHE education should achieve and what areas of basic core knowledge and awareness should pupils be expected to acquire at school through PSHE education?*

PSHE should ensure children leave school equipped emotionally and socially to deal with the world around them, and the relationships and responsibilities they will have with others both now and in the future, such as friends, parents, partners and children.

Parenting UK feels strongly that PSHE should include elements around child development and relationships which would help to prepare children to be parents in the future, making the focus on relationships in the Sex Education and Relationships section of PSHE focus also on family relationships and how these are the blueprint for all others. It is important to ensure that the next generation are equipped with the skills necessary for parenting.

PSHE should be made more accessible to parents in terms of language used and also in how schools communicate what is being taught in PSHE with parents and by getting them involved more. This would help to give parents a

window of opportunity to continue this learning with their child in the home environment if they know when their children are going to learn about important issues at school. It is important to stress that PSHE is not just about sex education but other important life skills as well.

Children should be taught in context about relationships, empathy, emotional resilience/behaviour etc, but this has to be mirrored in how children are taught, ie how teachers relate to them, to other teachers and also to parents. Programmes such as Nurturing Programme from Family Links work on this whole school approach to building empathy and resilience from a young age – it is imperative that it starts early ([www.familylinks.org.uk](http://www.familylinks.org.uk)).

It is also essential that schools understand the benefits of these wider aspects of PSHE – ie that building children’s empathy and resilience can have beneficial effect: reduction in aggressive behaviour and increased prosocial behaviour.<sup>1</sup>

**Question 2.** *Have you got any evidence that demonstrates why a) existing elements and b) new elements should be part of the PSHE education curriculum?*

Parenting UK recommends that there is a specific focus on parenthood education within PSHE education in schools as it offers the valuable chance to help children think about the role before they actually become parents. Parenthood education should not tell children what to think or how they should lead their lives when they become parents. It can, however, enable children and young people to:

- learn the skills that are necessary for successful family relationships; continuing to develop relationships; social and communication skills; stress, conflict and time management skills; and how to nurture self-esteem in both children and parents, through acknowledgement and thanks
- acquire knowledge about child development including the role of play and conversation, how children best learn, and children's social, emotional, physical and intellectual needs
- develop their understanding of some of the reasons for good and bad behaviour and how the parent-child relationship changes
- stimulate reflection and discussion of, for example, what the phrase 'good enough parenting' is trying to convey, what it might mean in practice, and where it might shade into 'not good enough' or even abusive parenting.

Parenthood education can help ensure that children:

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<sup>1</sup> Schonert-Reichl, K. A., Smith, V., Anat Zaidman-Zait, A., & Hertzman, C. (2011) Promoting Children’s Prosocial Behaviours in School: Impact of the “Roots of Empathy” Program on the Social and Emotional Competence of School-Aged Children.

- grow up with an understanding of the importance of the parenting role
- have acquired knowledge about the effects of positive parenting
- have the skills and personal resources to meet a child's need for love, safety and security
- have thought through some of the choices, responsibilities and issues
- involved in parenting
- are likely to make more effective parents in the future.

Children flourish when they have a good relationship with at least one parent and if their family life gives them structure and security as a framework for managing change and difficulty.

PSHE and citizenship work that addresses parenthood issues directly, especially within a positive school culture and ethos, will:

**Contribute to the raising of educational attainment:**

In the short-term, parenthood education in PSHE and citizenship work that addresses children's lives in a direct and relevant way can help to make school seem more approachable and thus in turn may reduce disaffection and truanting. Parenthood education as part of a PSHE programme can also contribute to improved motivation, confidence and attitude to work, especially when academically less able students are able to contribute on equal terms. Students may feel more committed to school and will develop their basic learning skills such as reflective skills, communication skills and planning. These can then be applied to National Curriculum subjects.

**Improve the mental health of all young people and create healthy schools:**

If future parents are better informed of young children's emotional needs and then set out to meet these when and if they do become parents, children will start out with a better chance of fulfilling their potential.

**Act as a direct stimulus to schools to involve parents more directly:**

Parenthood education is an opportunity to present the education of children as a collaborative process and show respect for the work that parents do.

**Reduce family conflict:**

Parenthood education will promote the importance of effective listening and empathy within families and will also help future families resolve conflicts. These skills are useful for the future role that young people may play in their own families but may also help them to avoid some of the difficulties they experience in their current circumstances.

**Help reduce teenage pregnancy:**

A clear understanding of the importance of the parenting role may encourage young people to think through the consequences of unprotected sexual activity and understand the reasons for delaying pregnancy. Parenthood education will also support their skills in making choices and acting responsibly to keep themselves and their future families safe and happy.

Parenthood education can be delivered both explicitly and implicitly within the whole school curriculum. The 'implicit' curriculum attends to the fundamental, or necessary, skills that must be in place to enable people to fulfil their parenting role effectively. They are generic and transferable between the four different strands of the PSHE curriculum. For example, work on building a sense of self and self-efficacy, moves to developing reflective, creative, social and decision-making skills. Not being exclusive to parenting, these skills do not require an overt 'parenting' identity and, at Key Stages 1 and 2, that label need not be used. The emotional environment of the school is also an important consideration. For example schools can explicitly and implicitly fulfil a critical role in modelling listening skills and highlighting the importance of empathy, such as in the bullying policy.

The 'explicit' parenthood curriculum will cover information, skills and situations particular to parenting. As parenthood education becomes more explicit, young people will be invited to reflect on their future role as parents. This change of focus, from the reality of the present to speculation about the future, from 'what is' to 'what will be', from experiential to more cognitive learning, is paralleled in other disciplines.

Explicit parenthood education at secondary level requires its own clearly identified syllabus within a time-specific module as part of a coherent PSHE programme. It also requires schools to attend to the place of parenting issues in:

- the whole school ethos and how it is followed through in practice
- pastoral arrangements
- quality partnership with and support for parents and carers.

(This answer is taken from *Parenthood Education, Guidance for Schools: Parenting UK 2002*

<http://www.parentinguk.org/files/downloads/guidanceforschools2011.pdf>)

**Question 6.** *How do you think the statutory guidance on sex and relationships education could be simplified, especially in relation to a) strengthening the priority given to teaching about relationships, b) the importance of positive parenting and c) teaching young people about sexual consent?*

Statutory guidance states that “education about relationships needs to focus on friendship, bullying and the building of self-esteem”.

Teaching about relationships should have a wider focus, highlighting to children the relationships they form with different people. With regard to teaching children about the importance of positive parenting, Parenting UK recommends that the review looks to evidence from programmes such as Social and Emotional Aspects of Learning and Roots of Empathy which guides children to observe the relationship between a baby and a parent, helping children to identify and reflect on their own feelings and the feelings of

others. (<http://www.rootsofempathy.org/>) (See also the answer to question 2 on implicit and explicit education about positive parenting).

**Question 9** *Have you got any examples of good practice in assessing and tracking pupils' progress in PSHE education?*

*Your answer should be evidence based and provide details of real-life case studies*

There are dilemmas associated with creating a formally assessed and certificated course in parenthood education. On the one hand it may represent an achievement for students who may find other subjects less interesting or engaging. But it may also favour more academically able students. Students who see the subject as irrelevant to their vocational aspirations may not be initially enthusiastic but if material is carefully chosen to be relevant and challenging then they are likely to appreciate the benefits. An assessment process that results in a judgement about a student's suitability to be a parent could undermine and contradict a process of learning that aims to foster self-development and personal growth.

Below is a series of alternative methods for assessment and accreditation of parenthood study:

### **Student logbooks**

Students will produce different kinds of outputs in parenthood lessons including discussion summaries, pairs work, written work, art work and practical activities. Logbooks can be used to record the learner's own thinking and can be assessed for involvement and engagement in a topic. Ability to follow through on projects can also be usefully assessed.

### **Certificates of achievement**

Certificates can be awarded on completion of a course of study and entered into a student's Record of Achievement. Attendance at the course may be the minimum required but other measures of ability and commitment could also be part of the award.

### **Validation of a course of study**

A course delivered as part of the PSHE curriculum can itself be accredited. An alternative is to accredit the teacher who delivers the course.

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