

23 November 2023

Department of Education
Curriculum Team
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Rathgill
Bangor
BT19 7PR

Dear Sir/Madam,

1. The content of teaching and learning resources for Learning for Life and Work developed by CCEA should be factual and contain age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion and these resources should not advocate, or oppose, a particular view on the moral and ethical considerations of abortion or contraception.

CSSC agrees with this statement, however, having an agreed and factual set of RSE learning resources is just part of the context for schools. CSSC is clear in its belief that a school should deliver the factual teaching of RSE but within the context of its own ethos, providing pupils not only with the scientific facts but also within a framework that clearly outlines the school's agreed values and morals as set out in their statement of ethos. 'Overall best practice in RSE is characterised by... clear linkages and explicit connections made with the aims, values, ethos, moral and ethical framework of the school (ETI, 2011).'¹ Flexibility for teachers and pupils to discuss and comment on moral and ethical issues which may arise in the teaching of RSE is critical to a holistic educational experience for our children.

2. Parents/carers should be informed about the specific nature and content of the age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.

¹ <https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/%5Bcurrent-domain%3Amachine-name%5D/report-of-an-evaluation-of-relationships-and-sexuality-education-in-post-primary-schools-2.pdf>

CSSC agrees with this statement and recognises that parents need to be informed in order to support and talk with their children at home. However, the term ‘informed’ is ambiguous. The precise level of detail to which parents should be informed will have a significant impact on schools and clear guidance is therefore essential. Guidance should be clear in respect of appropriate consultation with parents and the level of detail required in respect of content and resources. It is essential that there is a level of clarity in the guidance that will ensure consistency across all schools in their interpretation of what it means for a parent/carer to ‘be informed’. The need for clearer, more consistent, guidance was highlighted by schools and endorsed by ETI in a previous survey.² Clarity and consistency will be vital in minimising any potential legal challenges that schools might face if the guidance is ‘open to interpretation’.

3. The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child³ includes at Articles 1-3 and 12 the rights of the child to ‘express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously’ and at Article 5 ‘the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child’s increasing capacity to make their own choices.’ The Department’s guidance, when developed, should consider in such instances how schools balance the rights of both children and parents/carers in implementing the regulations.

CSSC agrees with this statement and recognises the important role of parents in supporting and talking with their children at home. The Department’s guidance, in considering how schools balance the rights of both children and parents/carers in implementing the regulations, should provide very clear guidelines for schools.

CSSC recognises that challenges are likely to arise from both children and parents/carers and therefore the guidance should include clear signposting for schools on agreed procedures when specific challenges arise. CSSC believes that the guidance should be clear for schools as to where both general support and legal advice can be sought. CSSC believes that in an attempt to strike a balance, where a tension arises in this area, a school’s agreed statement of ethos can provide the required context to assist pupils and parents/carers when considering their human rights in relation to RSE.

4. Pupils and parents/carers should have access to an overview of their school’s RSE policy and planned RSE programme.

CSSC agrees that pupils and parents/carers should have access to an overview of their school’s RSE policy and planned RSE programme. Similar to the first statement, CSSC would emphasise the need for and very clear guidance on meaningful consultation with stakeholders and the level of detail that parents/carers and pupils should expect to have access to, to ensure consistency across all schools. As with normal school development planning procedures, CSSC would advocate for the involvement of both parents/carers and pupils in the development and regular review of a school’s RSE policy and planned

² <https://www.etini.gov.uk/sites/etini.gov.uk/files/publications/relationships-and-sexuality-education-in-primary-and-special-schools.pdf>



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programme to ensure not only transparency in the process but that both the policy and programme would be aligned closely to the school's agreed statement of ethos. 'A planning process that involves wide-ranging consultation with all of the stakeholders, including the parents, pupils and governors' was endorsed by ETI as best practice in RSE.

Yours faithfully,

Mark Baker
Chief Executive