

Report summary

Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools

Personal, social and health education in English schools in 2012

The findings of this report are based on evidence from the inspections of 24 primary schools, 24 secondary schools and two special schools across all English regions between January and July 2012. Inspectors observed 290 lessons, 31 assemblies and 20 other PSHE education-related activities. They held meetings with approximately 200 teachers, leaders and managers and talked to approximately 700 pupils. Children and young people's experiences and opinions of PSHE education, from the 'Your Say' Children and Young People's Panel online survey conducted on behalf of Ofsted by Ipsos Mori during October and November 2012, contributed to the evidence gathered during the survey. The online survey received 178 responses from 11–18-year-olds in state schools and colleges across England.

Part A evaluates pupils' learning in PSHE education; strengths and weakness in teaching; curriculum provision; and the quality of leadership and management. Part B describes the characteristics of PSHE education that typically lead to outstanding learning, and those found in schools where PSHE education requires improvement or is inadequate. Subject leaders and their teams should use these characteristics to evaluate the quality of PSHE education in their own school.

Key findings

- Overall, learning in PSHE education was good or better in 60% of schools and required improvement or was inadequate in 40%. This indicates that the quality of PSHE education is not yet good enough in a sizeable proportion of schools in England.
- Sex and relationships education required improvement in over a third of schools. In primary schools this was because too much emphasis was placed on friendships and relationships, leaving pupils ill-prepared for physical and emotional changes during puberty, which many begin to experience before they reach secondary school. In secondary schools it was because too much emphasis

was placed on 'the mechanics' of reproduction and too little on relationships, sexuality, the influence of pornography on students' understanding of healthy sexual relationships, dealing with emotions and staying safe.

- Lack of high-quality, age-appropriate sex and relationships education in more than a third of schools is a concern as it may leave children and young people vulnerable to inappropriate sexual behaviours and sexual exploitation. This is because they have not been taught the appropriate language or developed the confidence to describe unwanted behaviours or know where to go to for help.
- In just under half of schools, pupils had received lessons about staying safe but few had developed the skills to effectively apply their understanding, such as the assertiveness skills to stand up for themselves and negotiate their way through difficult situations. Pupils understood the importance of applying security settings on social networking sites but did not always know how to set them or had not bothered to do so.
- Most pupils understood the dangers to health of tobacco and illegal drugs but were less aware of the physical and social damage associated with alcohol misuse, including personal safety.
- Approximately one third of respondents to the online survey wanted to learn how to deal with mental health issues such as coping with stress, bereavement and eating disorders.
- Knowledge and understanding of budgeting and economic enterprise were at least good in half of the primary schools and in two thirds of the secondary schools. Learning about careers was good or better in half of the secondary schools.
- Teaching required improvement in 42% of primary and 38% of secondary schools. Too many teachers lacked expertise in teaching sensitive and controversial issues, which resulted in some topics such as sexuality, mental health and domestic violence being omitted from the curriculum. This was because subject-specific training and support were too often inadequate. In 20% of schools, staff had received little or no training to teach PSHE education. Teaching was not good in any of these schools.
- By far the weakest aspect of teaching was the assessment of pupils' learning which was often less robust for PSHE education than for other subjects. In too many schools, teachers did not check or build on pupils' previous knowledge which resulted in them repeating topics, and they had lower expectations of the quality of pupils' work in PSHE education than for the same pupils in other subjects. Where the curriculum was strong it built on pupils' previous knowledge both in PSHE education lessons and in other subjects.
- The curriculum was good or better in two thirds of primary and secondary schools. The curriculum was usually more coherent and comprehensive in schools that offered discrete PSHE education lessons across the school. Where secondary schools taught PSHE education mainly through other subjects, students'

knowledge and understanding in Key Stage 4 depended largely on their GCSE option choices.

- In 80% of primary and secondary schools, outside speakers made a valuable contribution by bringing a wide range of expertise and life experiences to the PSHE education programme.
- The development of pupils' personal and social skills through PSHE education-related activities such as school and sports council leadership, residential trips and retreats was at least good in 42 of the 50 schools visited. However, few schools monitor and analyse the take-up of extra-curricular activities. Pupils' personal and social skills required improvement where the casual use of homophobic and disablist language was commonplace.
- The majority of schools provided good PSHE education for disabled pupils and those with special educational needs and for those whose circumstances made them vulnerable. The best provision included accredited courses and bespoke lessons for sex and relationships education, and drugs, alcohol and tobacco education.
- The quality of leadership and management in PSHE education was at least good in 56% of schools, required improvement in 42% and was inadequate in 2% of schools. All the schools that required improvement in PSHE education overall required improvement in leadership and management.
- In a third of primary and secondary schools the subject leader was inadequately trained for a leadership role and given too little time to meet with their team. In half of primary and two thirds of secondary schools the monitoring and evaluation of the quality of teaching and learning were deficient.

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