

# DRAFT

## Buckinghamshire Youth Parliament PSHE (Physical, Social, Health and Economic) Education report

*An Evaluation of Physical, Social, Health and Economic Education within the county of Buckinghamshire and recommendations for reform.*

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### OVERVIEW

PSHE was made compulsory by the Labour Government of 1997 and implemented in the year 2000. Our research suggests that, for many years, young people across the County of Buckinghamshire have viewed PSHE lessons as something of little value due to the lack of educational material and practical information they feel they attain from these lessons. With the Department of Education having pumped millions into this sector of education, surely something has been going wrong if those who are meant to be benefactors feel they have gained little. Over the last eighteen months of compulsory PSHE during secondary education in England. Members of Youth Parliament have consulted with young people from across Buckinghamshire through social media, youth councils and consultations in schools as a way of raising awareness of this issue. Quality PSHE education has the potential to affect society as a whole in a very positive way.

Investment in the futures of young people across England is crucial, this is why the UK Youth Parliament have raised and voted for Curriculum4Life to be their national campaign. The motion was one of five debated by the UK Youth Parliament in the House of Commons in 2013 and received 154 of the 295 votes cast. A total of 307 Members of Youth Parliament aged 11-18 took part in the debates, the subjects for which were voted for by over 250,000 young people across the UK.

The planned programmes introduced through PSHE, present an opportunity to solve (or at least work towards solving) social problems identified, reducing acts of anti-social behaviour, sexual health and unplanned pregnancies that often lead to unhealthy relationships with the family setting, better managing of finances – in society as a whole- as a way of reducing national deficit levels, accessing further education and jobs.

Although the scheme was met with great support from the schools & teachers, the question remains whether the students themselves ever fully understood the benefits they were meant to gain as part of this government initiative. The basis for this assumption is from some of the views the

young people have expressed and the teachers perception of the students 'laissez- faire' culture towards PSHE; therefore leading to frustrated teachers creating teaching plans and the handful of students engaged and interested in learning. There is a feeling of the need for better delivery of PSHE. In addition to this, with many schools having become Academies since 2006, PSHE has been one of the many subjects axed as its worth has not been seemingly matching its value and cost.

The need is for Bucks County Council to reconsider how Academies are monitored and how the physical, social and economic health of students is otherwise being catered to in order to enable young people access valuable life skills. Also, the continued restructuring work of the County Council should be taken as a timely opportunity to reform and improve the existing PSHE Scheme. It is in the best interests of local businesses, young people and the County Council to proceed with a reformed scheme as soon as possible instead of removing it, as this report will highlight. By doing so, Bucks County Council may look to make savings on their education budgets currently allocated to PSHE lessons and resources for schools.

This report establishes and clarifies the differences between what the proposed PSHE planned programmes were meant to look like and what the young people of Buckinghamshire say they are like. This is a way of determining both the successes and failures of the current scheme in order that an even better scheme may be reintroduced into schools. Recommendations for revision and improvement are outlined so that the current scheme could become more useful for young people in Buckinghamshire and worth the investment for Bucks County Council. The proposals of what should be taught and how the lessons should be delivered is based upon the views of young people and teachers during various consultations through the UK Youth Parliament, Buckinghamshire Youth Parliament, Bucks Youth Cabinet, and general youth engagement opportunities in schools and other places in 2012 to 2014. Some parts of the report may specifically reference the source of information.

### **What is PSHE?**

PSHE education is a planned programme of learning through which children and young people acquire the knowledge, understanding and skills they need to manage their lives. As part of a whole school approach, PSHE develops the qualities and attributes pupils need to thrive as individuals, family members and members of society<sup>1</sup>; according to the PSHE association for England. However, when we asked many young people what PSHE was, they simply reiterated what the acronym of PSHE meant (physical, social, health and economic education) but had no real grasp of what they had learnt from PSHE but understood what it was meant to teach them.

According to Ofsted's 'Not yet good enough: PSHE report'; 'PSHE is a non-statutory subject' that schools choose to teach because 'it makes a major contribution to their statutory responsibilities to promote children and young people's personal and economic well-being; offer sex and relationships education; prepare pupils for adult life and provide a broad and balanced curriculum of the benefits and preparation it gives young people for life.'<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <http://www.pshe-association.org.uk/content.aspx?CategoryID=1043>

<sup>2</sup> Well-being is defined in the Children Act 2004 as the promotion of physical and mental health; emotional well-being; social and economic well-being; education; training and recreation; recognition of the contribution made by children to society; and protection from harm and neglect.

Below the evaluation of the strengths and weaknesses of PSHE lessons helps us to appreciate how young people see and behold PSHE.

### **How Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education is delivered throughout England, focusing on key strength and weakness of implantation.**

In a report conducted by the Department of Education in November 2009 entitled Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education<sup>3</sup>: A mapping study of the prevalent models of delivery and their effectiveness it was concluded that schools with successful PSHE education were more likely to have the following features: a coherent, progressive curriculum across the full range of elements, core curriculum time, and well-resourced delivery. They were more likely to work in a context of clear support from senior leaders, and motivated, rewarded PSHE leaders. These schools were more likely to see the role of PSHE education as supporting both life skills and pupil learning and align this with their vision of the purpose of schooling more broadly.

In an Ofsted report which carried out an investigation into PSHE provision in 165 maintained schools in England between 2006 and 2009 it concluded that Pupils' achievement was good or outstanding in over three quarters of the schools visited. Across all the schools visited, the pupils seen enjoyed their PSHE lessons and saw their relevance. The development of their personal and social skills was a particular strength. They generally knew how to stay safe and healthy, although not all of them applied this knowledge to the choices they made, for example in relation to the food they ate. The new economic well-being and financial capability aspect of PSHE is still in its early stages and achievement in this area was less strong.

A key strength adopted by better schools implementing PSHE strategy, was the provision of a wide range of interesting extra-curricular activities, such as music and drama productions, school councils and residential visits, where students could develop and practise their personal and social skills. Many of the schools were using peer mentoring schemes successfully, where pupils were trained to use their skills to support others.

Additionally where teaching of PSHE was seen as good or outstanding, the key strengths were relationships, strong discipline and purposeful activities in each of the schools. External agencies provided expert contributions and enlivened lessons. The most effective curriculum model adopted for the provision of PSHE was one in which discrete, regularly taught PSHE lessons were supplemented with cross-curricular activities. In terms of weaknesses, where PSHE lessons were seen as inadequate, PSHE was mainly taught by form tutors, teachers lacked the necessary expertise to engage pupils and to challenge their misconceptions. Many of the secondary schools still fail to provide discrete curriculum time for PSHE education. In these schools it was taught only through tutorial time by form tutors or through 'suspended timetable' days with teaching lacking continuity and not covering some aspects of the subject in sufficient depth. Key aspects of assessment and tracking of pupils' progress in PSHE education were still the weakest aspects of provision.

In a report 'Positive Guidance on Aspects of Personal, Social and Health Education' conducted by the National Children's Bureau in 2006 a number of recommendations were delivered to enable

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/personal-social-health-and-economic-education-pshe>

schools and Education Authorities create a positive context and approach for PSHE approaches , develop good group work routines and use active learning methods.

In researching the above ideas it was discovered that PSHE has sometimes been driven by ‘problems’ which need to be solved, such as teenage pregnancy, substance misuse or obesity. In a desire to ‘solve the problem’, children and young people become targets of interventions, which, in many cases, they find irrelevant or detached from their experiences. It was found that PSHE lessons might focus on the exceptional in case studies, for example, by highlighting the case of a pregnant teenager rather than the strategies successfully used by the overwhelming majority of teenagers to avoid pregnancy. This can unintentionally lead pupils to a belief that becoming pregnant is more common than in fact it is which does not enable pupils to learn from the positive successes of others.

It seen that PSHE is much more likely to be successful if it starts with positive beliefs in children and young people. Emphasising positive social norms from the outset presents an exciting new approach to delivering PSHE and should be the way forward in delivering an effective programme within schools with a message that focuses on the majority behaviour or belief and not the minority.

### **PSHE IN Buckinghamshire**

In the past year, a survey was conducted across Buckinghamshire about PSHE via the internet<sup>4</sup> and via paper copies on young people aged 11-18. Teachers were also invited to give their views too. Some alarming weaknesses were found, however there was some strength’s included, below is what we found:

#### **Weaknesses**

1. A concerning proportion of young people surveyed (44%) did not know how to seek further support if an issue arose in a PSHE lesson that directly affects them.
2. Nearly half of young people who we surveyed (46%) ranked Sexual Abuse first or second on a list of topics they felt these topics were most in need of improvement (list included Relationships; Sexual Abuse; Mental Illness; Stereotypes, Appearance and Conforming to Trends; Real Life Advice (e.g. Financial education)
3. Consequences of such failings are highlighted elsewhere in our survey, where 11% of young people surveyed believed that engaging in sexual activity when they do not feel like doing so is ‘sometimes’ appropriate.
4. Only 9% of students surveyed believed that teachers ‘always’ take PHSE lessons seriously. The majority (51%) held that teacher ‘sometimes’ take PHSE lessons seriously, while a worrying proportion (40%) believed their teachers ‘rarely’ or ‘never’ take such lessons seriously.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.surveymonkey.com/s/88GS9G9>

5. When we asked the young people surveyed to rank 1-10 the usefulness of their PHSE to date (10 as the highest), the lowest and most common score (25%) was 1, and two thirds (65%) of those surveyed gave a response between 1-3. No respondent gave a score above 7.

*A few student comments on provision (For references please ask for the copies of the paper surveys):*

- 1) On lessons: 'I find it boring. The lessons are worthless.' 'I want my lessons to change.' 'I don't like the lack of learning anything valuable.'
- 2) On Sex Education/ Health: 'Little or nothing is said about sex education or the health (physical/mental) of young people and how we can deal with it.'
- 3) On student involvement: 'It's just the teacher talking throughout the whole lesson and students aren't involved enough.' 'Please make them interactive, not just copying stuff off the whiteboard.'

*A few teacher comments on provision (For references please ask for the copies of the paper surveys):*

- 1) On student input influencing schools PSHE Curriculum: 'None at all.'
- 2) Positive aspects of provision: 'Well for the students it is a time to talk.'
- 3) On how provision could be improved: 'More time given.' 'More outside speakers.' 'Status is often an issue – perception by both staff and students a constant battle.'
- 4) On resources: 'Some handy County produced guides / list of good resources would help.'

### **Analysis**

Provision in regards to sex and relationships education appears in need of serious improvement. Students believe that PHSE is currently of little benefit to them. This may be due to student disengagement with the topics covered by schools, and a desire for other topics to be introduced to the syllabus, or for existing topics to be covered in greater depth. Both students and teachers have separately acknowledged that teachers may also be disengaged with the topics which they are covering.

### **Recommendations**

#### *Possible Improvements to Sex & Relationships Education Provision*

1. BCC should encourage schools to considerably increase the time allocated to SRE related topics.
2. BCC should encourage schools to ask students which SRE topics they wish to see covered, and in what depth.
3. BCC should encourage schools to invest their PHSE budgets into resources provided by charities and pressures groups aiming to promote a healthy sexual lifestyle for young people. Such organisations **include** Brook, The Christopher Winter Project, and True Tube.
4. BCC should encourage schools to make use of relevant outside speakers, who may be able to provide a higher quality of provision on certain SRE topics than regular teachers within the school.

#### *Possible Improvements to the Student Perception of PHSE*

1. BCC should encourage schools to timetable greater time for PHSE provision, thus placing and demonstrating greater commitment to the subject.
2. BCC should encourage schools to elect representatives from year groups to work alongside the teachers responsible for PHSE coordination. The aim should be to tailor each particular year group's PHSE provision to that year group's needs, within the constraints of the national curriculum. This should better ensure genuine student engagement.
3. BCC could establish a County wide PHSE monitoring committee, organised through the Youth Service. Each school within the County would be offered one seat, their representative elected from their student body. The committee would meet as often as required (possibly termly). Its aim would be to strengthen links between schools in regards to PHSE provision, identify examples of best practice, and expand such strong provision to other schools across the County. The existence and importance of such a committee would likely raise the student perception of PHSE.
4. BCC should encourage schools to train teachers in certain areas of PHSE expertise. Some handy County produced guides / list of good resources would help i.e. a resource bank.

**Facebook Survey** In the summer of 2013 a Facebook group was opened by us to all young people in Buckinghamshire to post their views about current PSHE provision in the county.<sup>5</sup> Any young person was welcome to comment if attending a school within the county. Below is information we pulled out.

#### **Most mentioned topics from the Facebook page**

- 1) A vast amount of comments of young people wanting PSHE to be less taboo, less generic, more real life, not awkward or holding back, treat them like adults and tell it to them straight
- 2) Relationships – hetero, homosexual and lesbian. How to act in a relationship. Not just sex.
- 3) Sexual abuse
- 4) Mental illness
- 5) Stereotypes, gender dysphonia, how to act, respecting yourself
- 6) Real life advice and teachings – finance, bills, rent, University fees, jobs.

#### **Interesting comments from young people**

1) Relationships: - How to communicate, for both hetero and homosexuals and possibly include a bit about gender dysphonia for intersex individuals. This should be separate from sex education though, it should also include personal safety and discussions about stereotypes. Young women need to realise 'rolling their skirt up won't make boys like you and boys need to realise taking dangerous risks to impress peers isn't the way either.'

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/groups/533074733391728/?fref=ts>

2) Sex education: - It shouldn't just be about straight relationships. 'I'm a lesbian and I'm pretty sure I can't get pregnant from a girl so half the lessons are irrelevant to me.'

3) Information: - 'We need UN-FILTERED information. We learn all about drugs alcohol etc. but in a much filtered way, as to not 'upset' us. We need to know about real issues! The harsh reality! Mental illnesses for example aren't taught properly because it is seen as a taboo subject. We need to be taught these things so that we can understand and know how to deal with these problems!'

4) Lessons: - I think that as much as some of it is useful, the majority is useless, dull and unimaginative. It ends up just being a free period. Nobody shows an interest because they are aware of the fact that most of what we learn is not relevant. I think they need to take more interest in what we are interested in and what affects us.

5) Sexual Abuse: - Oh and we need to be taught about sexual abuse because there are still loads of people who think it's ok, or don't know where to draw the line.

*Analysis:* Comments like the one's drawn up above, raise concern over discontent on PSHE provision. Students seem to demand much more from their PSHE lessons in regards to content and what is taught, they seem to want a key input into content that is taught.

**Recommendations:**

- 1) Schools should be more thorough in their monitoring and evaluation of PSHE, using a wide range of evidence.
- 2) Schools should engage with pupils to determine how they can best respond to their individual needs and concerns, drawing on the support of appropriate external agencies.
- 3) Greater attention should be paid to creating a broad PSHE programme including elements such as mental health and well-being, parenting education and financial awareness education which are currently being neglected in many schools.

**Strengths of PSHE provision within the County**

In our survey and additional analysis across the County some strengths were found, never the less there is still room for improvement. Below is evidence which highlights the strengths.

- 1) Currently BCC has an audit on the Bucks GFL website to help schools with monitoring and evaluating PSHE. <sup>6</sup>

During Key Stage 3 pupils:	What we already do	Effective			What else we can do	Difficulty		
		+	-	?		1	2	3
learn about themselves as growing and changing individuals and as members of their communities with more maturity, independence and power.								
become more self-aware, and are capable of more sophisticated moral reasoning.								
take more responsibility for themselves and become more aware of the views, needs and rights of people of all ages.								
build on the experience, confidence and competence they developed in key stage 2, learning new skills to help them make decisions and play an active part in their personal and social life.								
learn how to plan and manage choices for their courses and career.								
continue to develop and maintain								

Bucks GFL website

- 3) We found some schools that did have outside speakers and include a lot of student input e.g. appointing 'PSHE prefects.'
- 4) Pupil's knowledge has seemed to improve over a while.