

**THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND  
SEX AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION (SRE)  
SCOTTISH PARLIAMENT PUBLIC PETITION PE 1526**

**EIS response to questions from the Scottish Parliament Public Petitions Committee on call for the introduction of compulsory sex and relationship education to the Scottish curriculum**

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS) is of the view that sex and relationships education (SRE) is crucial to the development of the health and wellbeing of children and young people. Doubtless, it is essential in supporting them to develop positive, informed attitudes in relation to their own sexual and emotional health and wellbeing, and in helping them to develop positive, healthy relationships with others. Without such education, children and young people are at greater risk, of sexually transmitted infection, teenage pregnancy, sexual and domestic violence, as outlined by the petitioners, and of sexual harassment, for example.

Equally important, though, is the ability of schools to tailor provision of sex and relationships education to the skills of staff and the specific needs of pupils, in accordance with the philosophy of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE). CfE rightly gives teachers the professional autonomy to create appropriate learning experiences for their pupils, in recognition of the fact that teachers know their pupils well, and are skilled in assessing and responding to their particular learning needs. Mandatory, blanket provision would limit the ability of teachers to respond to the specific needs of their pupils as they relate to Health and Wellbeing.

Teacher professionalism also means that practitioners are skilled in identifying their own professional learning needs. The EIS is firmly of the view that high quality professional learning opportunities must be made available in areas where teachers themselves identify professional development need. This would apply within the context of Personal and Social Education (PSE) curriculum delivery generally, and specifically, to SRE, as it does to all other areas of the curriculum.

Furthermore, at present, there is a degree of flexibility within the arrangements for delivery of PSE within secondary schools since few secondary teachers have been specifically trained in PSE as part of their Initial Teacher Education. Within this context, there is room for negotiation in the way that PSE classes are currently assigned, these often being matched to the particular skills and expertise of individual teachers. By making SRE mandatory, putting greater onus on all teachers to deliver this sensitive curricular content, this element of flexibility would disappear, arguably to the detriment of the learning experience.

With regards to the discussion as it focused on partnership working, the EIS concurs with the view that schools 'cannot do everything', particularly when the curriculum,

especially within primary, is extremely crowded as it is at present. In light of this, the Institute would agree that there is a role for parents and other partners to play in ensuring that children and young people are equipped with the knowledge and understanding requisite for good sexual and emotional health and wellbeing.

In addition, the EIS recognises the importance of consultation with parents in the delivery of SRE within schools and recognises that there may be sensitivities around addressing areas of curricular content in light of the varying religious and moral beliefs among parents of children and young people attending school. Once again, the Institute would highlight the need for appropriate, high quality professional learning opportunities to be made available for teachers who may feel it necessary, in supporting them to address these particular sensitivities.

Finally, the EIS agrees with the petitioners on the importance of sex and relationship education in challenging homophobic attitudes within schools and, again, would support calls for additional professional learning opportunities being made available to teachers in relation to this and other aspects of Equality.