

THE EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTE OF SCOTLAND

EIS Response to the Education and Skills Committee question:

“What should personal and social education sessions be about?”

The Educational Institute of Scotland (EIS), Scotland’s largest education union, welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Committee on the above question.

It is the view of the EIS that personal and social education (PSE) should be firmly aligned to Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) principles and practice in the following ways.

Firstly, PSE lessons should be designed in such a way as to enable children and young people to develop in the four capacities of CfE in preparation for becoming fully responsible citizens, effective contributors, confident individuals and successful learners. Curriculum content should reflect this purpose, in age and stage appropriate ways, with critical thinking approaches embedded in the learning activities.

With regards to specific curriculum content, current EIS policy does not favour prescription. Precise content and the method of delivery of the curriculum, in the spirit of CfE, should be a matter for teacher professional judgement.

The EIS view is that teachers, as well-trained, reflective professionals who work collegiately with their colleagues, and in partnership with parents and the wider community, are well placed to respond to the learning needs of their pupils and students whom they know well, in ways that will ensure relevance of curricular content and therefore the engagement of learners with it. Those primary teachers who have been trained in PSE as part of their Initial Teacher Education, or those in the secondary sector whose particular experience is in pastoral care, or those in either sector whose knowledge and skills are in a specific area of PSE, are best-placed to deliver such learning.

In addition, the EIS is clear that, broadly speaking, the curriculum, including for PSE, must address equality matters and, indeed embody a commitment to equality, as the CfE framework does. PSE lessons are a key way, in combination with others, in which to equip children and young people with the knowledge and skills to challenge racism, religious-based prejudice, homophobia, transphobia, sexism and misogyny, and negative attitudes towards disability, including mental ill-health.

Accompanying this should be learning about rights and responsibilities to enable children and young people to understand theirs and others’ entitlements, balanced with an understanding of theirs and others’ responsibilities, and of how to exercise these appropriately.

In addition, the EIS view is that PSE is a key area of the curriculum through which to develop aspects of children's and young people's learning and development within Health and Wellbeing- both physical and emotional, including in relation to sex and relationships education (SRE).

The EIS regards SRE as being crucial to the ensuring 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, and of sexual harassment, for example.

Good practice in terms of PSE delivery would also include coverage of and progression in learning about, the processes of participation and democracy, with the aim of supporting the development of children's and young people's political literacy. Linked to learning about the world of work, the EIS would wish to see included, most definitely though not exclusively before young people embark on work experience placements, learning about rights at work and the role of trade unions in promoting and protecting such rights, and of health and safety in the workplace.