

Education Committee's Inquiry into Personal Social Health and Economic education and Sex and Relationship education



Written Evidence - The Children's Society June 2014

1. Introduction

- 1.1. The Children's Society is a leading charity committed to improving the lives of thousands of children and young people every year. We work across the country with the most disadvantaged children through our specialist services and children's centres. Our direct work with vulnerable groups including disabled children, children in or leaving care, refugee, migrant and trafficked children, means that we can place the voices of children at the centre of our work.
- 1.2. We run 11 projects supporting young people in care and 13 specialist projects working with children who run away or go missing and/or are at risk or victims of sexual exploitation.
- 1.3. We welcome this important inquiry into the status of Personal Social Health and Economic Education and Sex and Relationship Education. Many of the children we work with are vulnerable to abuse and exploitation. We believe that equipping them with skills and knowledge to stay safe and maintain healthy relationship through the PSHE and SRE curriculum is as important as an effective child protection response. Our submission is informed by learning from our direct work with vulnerable children and young people.

2. Summary of key points

- 2.1. We believe that there is enough evidence to indicate that current lack of status for PSHE and SRE in the curriculum leads to inadequate teaching of these subjects. Therefore, we believe that PSHE and SRE should become a statutory part of curriculum.
- 2.2. Children and young people, particularly if they come from dysfunctional backgrounds, are not always able to recognise the signs of sexual exploitation and grooming. We believe that children should be taught about the risk of running away, grooming, child sexual exploitation and how to seek help as part of the PSHE and SRE curriculum to enable them to deal with situations, seek help and prevent these risks escalating further.
- 2.3. Our research over a number of years has shown that running away is an issue that affects all children therefore effective prevention strategies need to be rolled out across mainstream education. The PSHE curriculum has a critical role to play as part of these strategies. This is in line with the recommendations from the Home Affairs Committee on localised grooming, which stressed the need for investment in school prevention work through education of young people about grooming and gang exploitation. (House of Lords, 2013).
- 2.4. We believe that teachers of PSHE and SRE should receive specialist training on running away, child sexual exploitation and risk taking behaviour among young people so they are better equipped to teach these subjects.

- 2.5. We believe SRE curriculum is critical not just to help young people stay safe but also to prevent the development of offending behaviour. To achieve change in attitudes and behaviours it is important to good quality CRE is available to all children in school and across local community.
- 2.6. We believe that more needs to be done to tie financial education through PSHE to practical savings incentives.
- 2.7. The government should establish a wider trial of credit union accounts, including linking this in to financial education in schools, to establish the effectiveness of this approach in promoting savings to young people.

3. The status and quality of PSHE and SRE education in curriculum

- 3.1. We believe that the core outcomes of PSHE education should be to help children and young people develop as individuals and as members of society and learn about real life issues so that they can stay safe and know where to get help if they need it. Therefore, it is important that PSHE and SRE subjects are of consistently good quality across all schools and are seen as important elements of the curriculum. A number of reports have highlighted the importance of the PSHE curriculum and a whole school approach in exploring attitudes and values, supporting inclusion and teaching respect and noted the correlation between effectiveness and quality of PSHE and the level of academic achievement in schools¹.
- 3.2. A number of recent government reviews of PSHE and SRE (The SRE review of 2008, The MacDonald review of PSHE in 2009, the review of PSHE in 2011) as well as Ofsted reports into PSHE and SRE showed that although there are good examples of how these subjects are approached in schools overall the teaching of these subjects remains of inconsistent quality and requires improvement. Surveys of young people also indicate that they are not getting good quality education, particularly about relationships and sex. For example, in 2007 21,000 young people took part in a survey organised by the UK Youth Parliament and 40 percent of those young people said that their SRE was 'poor' or 'very poor' (UKYP, 2007). More recent survey showed that 27% of young people thought SRE was bad or 'very bad' and 30% did not learn about consent through SRE education (NCB, 2013).
- 3.3. In April 2014 the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, at the end of her visit to the UK, asserted that "I have also noted the efforts of the UK Government, the Governments in the constituent countries, and also voluntary sector organisations, in the design and launching of campaigns aimed at reaching out to young people and educating them about different manifestations of violence, including in the home, in schools and in social media and on the internet. I was informed of the national prevention campaign *This is Abuse*, which encourages teenagers to rethink their views about rape, consent, violence and abuse. In order to play a truly transformative role in the longer term, this campaign, as well as similar initiatives, need to be part of the curriculum and be institutionalised in the education system"².

¹ Ofsted (2013) Not yet good enough: personal social health and economic education in schools.

² <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14514&LangID=E> Special Rapporteur on violence against women finalizes country mission to the United Kingdom and Northern Ireland and calls for urgent action to address the accountability deficit and also the adverse impacts of changes in funding and services

3.4. **We believe that there is enough evidence to indicate that current lack of status for PSHE and SRE in the curriculum leads to inadequate teaching of these subjects. Therefore, we believe that PSHE and SRE should become statutory part of curriculum. Children and young people, particularly if they come from dysfunctional backgrounds, are not always able to recognise the signs of sexual exploitation and grooming. It is important to teach them about the risks of running away and the signs of child sexual exploitation.**

4. Good quality SRE and PSHE education helps prevent abuse and sexual exploitation.

4.1. Children and young people we work with also persistently tell us that good quality education about how to stay safe, how to seek help, and grooming and sexual exploitation are key to protecting children and young people from abuse. Many young runaways who are involved in our projects are not educated about risks of running away, such as risk of sexual exploitation or grooming as explained in the case study below.

4.2. Case study – Helping children to understand healthy relationships. Catherine aged 14 was referred to The Children’s Society’s project for a return interview. Catherine was going missing, drinking alcohol, associating with other vulnerable young people and visiting addresses which are considered unsafe for children in different parts of the city where she lived. Planned sessions with Catherine covered work about grooming, internet safety, alcohol, feelings, family and sexual health. Catherine stated that she could now recognise potential grooming scenarios that had already occurred and felt she would also be able to identify risky grooming situations in the future.

4.3. The young runaways we spoke to about their experiences and how they can be better protected told us that effective responses to young runaways in addition to the response at the time the child goes missing should include educating young people about the risks of running away.

‘Young people should know what the risks are, they need to have them drilled down’

‘If you need help you should be able to ask for help’

‘There need to be places where you can go and know that you are not going to be judged’

‘It’s like grooming – I learnt about it here in the project’

Sex education should provide education about running away and risks’

4.4. The Children’s Society has produced a number of authoritative studies into the problem of running away. Our latest study ‘*Still running 3*’ published in 2011 found that around 84,000 under 16s in England run away overnight on at least one occasion every year. The study shows that little has improved for children who run away with only a third being reported to the police. It indicates that family change and conflict play a significant part in children’s decisions to run. This includes young people who said they had experienced physical abuse or violence, emotional abuse or neglect (e.g. feeling continually blamed or put down, uncared for or rejected), domestic violence, sexual abuse or said that they were scared. In addition, there are particularly vulnerable groups of children who are more likely to run away such as disabled children, children with learning difficulties and children in care.

4.5. Of those children who run away fewer than 30% are reported as missing to the police by their parents and guardians. Only a small minority (5%) will seek professional help while they are away; either because they do not know what help is available for them, or they

are worried about the consequences of asking for help. Young people experience different risks associated with running away:

- A total of 17% of overnight runaways either slept rough and / or with someone they'd just met.
- 21% slept in one of these places and / or said they were hurt or harmed.
- If begging in order to survive is also added, the figure rises to 22%.
- If stealing in order to survive is also added the total proportion of young runaways with one or more of these experiences is just over 25%.

4.6. **We believe that children should be taught about the risk of running away, grooming, child sexual exploitation and how to seek help as part of PSHE and SRE curriculum to enable them deal with situations, seek help and prevent these risks escalating further.**

5. Improve SRE and PSHE through providing training to teachers

5.1. Many of The Children's Society's programmes deliver work in schools to help educate children about the risks of running away and empower them with the knowledge they need about how to keep safe and where to go for help. From our work in schools we know that education staff often do not feel confident talking to children about issues of running away, or the risk of CSE, due to the lack of training they receive and a lack of awareness about these issues. In particular, many staff need greater awareness of the reasons young people are running away, grooming processes, risk of peer on peer exploitation, online grooming and other related issues.

5.2. This lack of awareness amongst schools professionals is made worse by a poor understanding of the complex reasons why young people run away. Our practitioners report that many teachers see young people who run away or are absent from school as '*troublesome*'³. Our practice also reports that the attitudes of some professionals to children who are sexually exploited remain an issue of concern. This was highlighted in the APPG inquiry we supported into children who go missing from care⁴. The inquiry found that in many cases where children are at risk of, or have experienced sexual exploitation, they were seen by professionals, including the police, as "promiscuous" and making an active "choice" to become involved in a particular "lifestyle" or were seen in some way "complicit" in their abuse. The inquiry was told that some professionals saw sexual activity between a child under 16 and an adult as acceptable. They believed that the young person had "consented" to sexual relations and therefore did not perceive it as a child protection or sexual exploitation concern. In other examples, professionals could recognise CSE but believed that a young person could not be helped.

5.3. **Our research over a number of years has shown that running away is an issue that affects all children therefore effective prevention strategies need to be rolled out across mainstream education. The PSHE curriculum has a critical role to play as part of these strategies. This is in line with the recommendations from the Home Affairs Committee on localised grooming, which stressed the need for investment in school prevention work through education of young people about grooming and gang exploitation. (House of Lords, 2013).**

³ The Children's Society (2012) Lessons to Learn: exploring the link between running away and absence from school.

⁴ The APPG for Runaway and Missing Children and Adults and the APPG for Looked After Children and Care Leavers (2012) Report from the joint inquiry into children who go missing from care

- 5.4. **We believe that teachers of PSHE and SRE should receive specialist training on running away, child sexual exploitation and risk taking behaviour among young people so they are better equipped to teach these subjects.**

6. Whole school approach

- 6.1. A number of research reports in recent years have highlighted increases in the incidence of peer on peer sexual violence and exploitation. It is certainly an issue identified by our practice as highlighted in examples from practice below.
- 6.2. *Example from practice: boys as potential perpetrators.* The Children's Society's project in Lancashire ran a six weeks programme with two groups of boys in a school that was struggling with the attitude of some of its male pupils in relation to females in general and their peers in particular. These boys were identified due to their behaviour and attitudes which meant some of them had already been suspended from school and there were concerns that as they grow up, these young men would become perpetrators of sexual violence and CSE. As in this case the boys were Asian and Muslim, we brought in STREET (a youth Muslim organisation) to run some of the sessions with the project worker and the school. At the end of the process the boys wrote and designed a leaflet aimed at other boys to pass the key messages they had learnt and may help other young men. This leaflet is now being used in the school and passed on to other schools and groups, helping to challenge negative views young men have about their female peers and relationships. As a result of this, the school felt empowered to address these attitudes and choose to develop ongoing work with their male pupils alongside the project.
- 6.3. **We believe SRE curriculum is critical not just to help young people stay safe but also to prevent development of offending behaviour. To achieve change in attitudes and behaviours it is important to good quality CRE is available to all children in school and across local community.**

7. Financial Education and PSHE

- 7.1. Financial Education can be a crucial part of PSHE, by helping to ensure that children have vital skills in money management and helping to prevent young people getting into debt when they become young adults – making them less vulnerable to the kinds of income shocks and expenditure pressures which can threaten to lead to debt problems.
- 7.2. The recent "Debt Trap" report by The Children's Society and Stepchange, explored the issue of financial education in school, through a combination of interviews and a survey of 2000 children aged 10-17 and their parents.
- 7.3. Both parents and children questioned raised concerns about the level of financial education provided through schools.
'I think kids should be educated more about it in school, because I didn't have a clue what I was getting myself into at 19.'
- 7.4. Nearly nine out of 10 (88%) parents said that schools should do more to teach children about debt and money management, with 47% saying they should do 'a lot more'. Similarly, only 21% of children (aged 10-17) said that they agreed that their school taught them about debt and money management.
- 7.5. Concerns were also raised in our survey that children were frequently seeing advertising for credit – with 56% of children aged 10-17 saying that they were seeing such advertising 'often' or 'all the time'. Previous research by MoneySavingExpert.com found

more than one in three people with children under 10 have heard their kids repeat payday loan slogans from television adverts.

- 7.6. When we talked to a small group of young people about advertising for debt, they were able to name several companies that advertise in this way, and made a number of critical comments:

'It's persuading people to get into debt.'

'Persuading other people to get loans that they need, telling them if they need it they'll get it quick and simple.'

- 7.7. We agree with the critique these young people make. The Debt Trap research shows how people are often using credit to pay for essentials, sometimes to replace income spent repaying other credit. This can often lead to disastrous consequences as families with children fall further into arrears. Yet children are being exposed to a barrage of advertising for credit products that we believe underplays the risks of falling into debt. We are concerned that this will help re-enforce a biased view of the relative benefits and dangers of credit use among the next generation of borrowers. MoneySavingExpert.com research has previously found that 14% of parents say that when they have refused to buy something for their child who is under 10, they have been 'nagged' to take out a payday loan for it.
- 7.8. Effective financial education is needed to counter this influence, to explain to children the dangers of credit, and to equip them to understand the potential risks inherent in the products they see advertised. At the same time financial education should give children an understanding of effective routes out of problem debt without recourse to further borrowing, help build financial resilience through savings and minimise the isolation that children in families in problem debt feel. This last aim is important to help children cope with the day-to-day consequences of their parents' financial difficulties.
- 7.9. **We believe that more needs to be done to tie financial education through PSHE to practical savings incentives. For example, local authorities in both Glasgow and the London Borough of Haringey are providing secondary school children with 'seed money' in a credit union account to get them saving, and encouraging linking this to financial education in school.**
- 7.10. **The government should establish a wider trial of credit union accounts, including linking this in to financial education in schools, to establish the effectiveness of this approach in promoting savings to young people.**

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