

How statutory PSHE could support children and young people's mental health

Growing concerns about children and young people's mental health

There is huge concern about young people's mental health and factors that can affect it, including issues relating to self-esteem, body image, relationships, social media use and anxieties about the future.

- Poor mental health is the key emerging risk for children and young people according to recent research (SHEU, 2015; Cabinet Office, 2015¹) and a number of recent reports, including:
 - i. The 'Mental health and behaviour in schools'² advice published by the Department for Education (DfE) in March 2016 highlights that one in ten children and young people have a clinically diagnosed mental health disorder and that around one in seven has less severe mental health problems.
 - ii. A report by the Chief Medical Officer found that 50 per cent of adult mental health problems start before the age of 15 and 75 per cent before the age of 18,³
 - iii. The Chief Medical Officer's 2012 report⁴ suggested long-term costs associated with childhood mental health problems are estimated to be £2.35 billion and the short-term costs £1.58 billion.
 - iv. The Prince's Trust Macquarie Youth Index for 2017 revealed that young people's happiness and wellbeing is at its lowest level since the first edition of the index in 2009.⁵

What is PSHE education and how can it help?

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a non-statutory school curriculum subject in England. It develops the knowledge, skills and attributes all pupils need to keep mentally and physically healthy, safe and prepared for life and work in modern Britain.

- PSHE education includes promoting emotional wellbeing, building resilience, establishing and protecting good mental health and tackling mental health related stigma. It also supports pupils to disclose issues and seek professional help when necessary and forms a vital part of a whole school approach to mental health.
- Teaching resources to support mental health and emotional wellbeing through PSHE are available, including PSHE Association guidance and lesson plans, funded by the Department for Education⁶. However, as explained below, such mental health lessons are only taught in a fraction of schools as there is no obligation on schools to cover PSHE education.

So, schools don't have to teach about mental health?

Despite its potential, PSHE education is not a statutory curriculum subject, meaning many schools don't offer it regular curriculum time and in some cases schools don't cover PSHE at all. Hundreds of thousands of pupils miss out on lessons that can support their mental and emotional wellbeing as a result.

- Research suggests 93% of mental health programmes in secondary schools are delivered through PSHE education.⁷ However, Ofsted's 2013 report into PSHE education⁸ found that PSHE education needed improvement in at least 40% of schools, with lessons too often delivered by teachers with insufficient training and curriculum time.
- The Commons Education Committee 'Life Lessons' report concluded that PSHE provision is 'deteriorating'⁹, an assessment backed by Department for Education data¹⁰ which suggests that curriculum time dedicated to PSHE decreased by over 32% at key stages 3 and 4 between 2011 and 2015, demonstrating the urgent need to act.

Given the seriousness of the issue this is also a potentially dangerous situation . . .

Responsibility for teaching PSHE education is often given to untrained, unprepared and inexperienced teachers due to its low status compared to other subjects. This is worrying considering the complexity and seriousness of the issues it covers.

- Statutory status should increase opportunities for teachers to receive high-quality training and increase the number of lessons taught by more experienced teachers, thereby greatly reducing these risks and increasing the potential for positive impacts on pupils' emotional health.
- Meanwhile, in the absence of high quality lessons – or sometimes any lessons at all – young people are more likely to turn to less reputable and sometimes dangerous sources of information and support. For example, 'pro-ana' online communities which advocate anorexia as a lifestyle choice and provide advice and support to maintain this 'lifestyle' as opposed to promoting support to change these harmful behaviours.

. . . which is why the PSHE Association is leading a campaign calling on government to make PSHE compulsory in all schools

The PSHE Association¹¹ is the national body for personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education in England, providing advice and support to a network of over 18,000 teachers and other professionals working in schools nationwide. We are also leading the campaign that calls on the Government to ensure all pupils and all schools benefit from PSHE education.

- There is strong and growing support for statutory PSHE education, including amongst leading mental health bodies. These include: the Children and Young People's Mental Health Coalition, the Royal College of Psychiatrists, Rethink Mental Illness, Royal College of Paediatrics and Child Health, Centre for Mental Health, Royal College of General Practitioners, Faculty of Public Health, Royal College of Nursing, Association of Young People's Health, Campaign Against Living Miserably (CALM), Men's Health Forum, The Children's Society.¹²
- In its 2015 Inquiry into Parity of Esteem for Mental Health, the All Party Parliamentary Group on Mental Health recommended that 'mental health education should form a core part of the PSHE curriculum, to promote wellbeing and resilience in children and young people and prevent mental health problems developing'.¹³
- The Chief Medical Officer's 2012 report stated that PSHE education "*forms a bridge between health and education by building resilience and wellbeing*"¹⁴ and Statutory PSHE education was recommended by the Education Select Committee in its 'Life Lessons' report¹⁵ and by the chairs of five select committees (Health; Education; Women and Equalities; Home Affairs; Business, Energy and Industrial Strategy) in their letter to the Education Secretary on the matter.¹⁶
- The 2017 joint inquiry into the role of education in supporting mental health by the Commons Education and Health Committees concluded that there should be a whole-school approach to mental health, with statutory PSHE education playing an important role. The report also highlighted the potential effects of social media use on mental health and how PSHE education can help in this regard.¹⁷

And there's evidence that this works?

Yes, there is significant evidence supporting the positive impact of PSHE education on children and young people's mental health, and the added benefit that this can aid academic achievement. For example:

- The 2015 Department for Education review of impact and effective practice in PSHE¹⁸ concluded that "*the evidence shows that PSHE education can improve the physical and psychosocial well-being of pupils. A virtuous cycle can be achieved, whereby pupils with better health and well-being achieve better academically*"
- A meta-analysis of 75 studies¹⁹ on universal school-based social, emotional and/or behavioural programmes concluded that these lessons could benefit pupils in seven outcome measures including social skills, antisocial behaviour, positive self-image, mental health, and prosocial behaviour.
- PSHE education also has the potential to address issues which contribute to mental health related problems. A Cochrane Review of Health-Promoting Schools (Langford et al 2014)²⁰ demonstrated that health education,

as part of a whole-school approach, can have an impact on pupils' health behaviours; it also showed promising results in relation to bullying and violence.

- Evidence also shows pupils who are positive about the PSHE lessons they receive are more likely to have positive relationships as well as a strong feeling of belonging at school.²¹
- We believe this also helps to explain the strong correlation between schools which achieved a high grade from Ofsted for PSHE education and schools which were awarded outstanding grades for overall effectiveness, as identified in the 2013 Ofsted PSHE report (Ofsted, 2013)²².
- There is also growing evidence of the links between social and emotional learning, non-cognitive skill development and academic success:
 - i. A DfE commissioned report²³ (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012) found that children with higher levels of emotional wellbeing have higher levels of academic success in school.
 - ii. The Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit²⁴, which provides up-to-date summaries of the impact of different educational interventions, states that Social and Emotional Learning programmes have a "significant impact on attitudes to learning... and attainment itself (on average three to four months additional progress)" (EEF, 2014).
 - iii. A study by US economist James Heckman²⁵ looking at the impacts of life-long learning in a range of educational settings highlights the positive relationship between socio-emotional skills, physical development, mental health and scores achieved in Standardised Attainment Tests (Heckman, 2008)
 - iv. A study of emotional resilience programmes in 22 UK schools²⁶ (Challen et al, 2011) found short-term improvement in pupil attendance and attainment rates, particularly amongst those eligible for free school meals and pupils who had been performing at below national average in maths and English.
 - v. An analysis of over 200 Social and Emotional Learning programmes²⁷ by Durlak et al (2011) demonstrated improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour and an 11% improvement in academic achievement.

What is the government's position and what needs to happen next?

The Department for Education has recognised the need to improve the 'quality and accessibility' of PSHE education, and Government amendments to the Children and Social Work Act²⁸ will make relationships and sex education (RSE) - a component of PSHE education - statutory in schools from September 2019 while at the same time announcing a consultation process to determine whether to make PSHE education statutory in its entirety.

The PSHE Association will aim to work with organisations involved in various aspects of PSHE education during this process, including leading mental health bodies, to make the most of this opportunity to press for statutory status for the subject as a whole.

The PSHE Association's five priorities for statutory PSHE education are that it should be taught:

- **regularly** – regular lessons on the timetable like other subjects
- **as a whole subject** – from RSE to mental & physical health, online safety to job skills
- **by trained teachers** – PSHE covered in teacher training and ongoing opportunities to learn
- **in all schools** – all schools including academies, free schools and independent schools
- **to all pupils** – from year 1 to finishing secondary school

¹ <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/news/growing-concerns-about-children-and-young-people%E2%80%99s>

² https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/508847/Mental_Health_and_Behaviour_-_advice_for_Schools_160316.pdf

³ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-medical-officer-cmo-annual-report-public-mental-health>

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- ⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-medical-officers-annual-report-2012-our-children-deserve-better-prevention-pays/cmos-annual-report-2012-our-children-deserve-better-cmos-summary-as-a-web-page>
 - ⁵ https://www.princes-trust.org.uk/about-the-trust/research-policies-reports/youth-index-2017?utm_source=twitter&utm_campaign=youth_index&utm_medium=direct
 - ⁶ <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/guidance-preparing-teach-about-mental-health-and>
 - ⁷ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/414024/Childrens_Mental_Health.pdf
 - ⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/not-yet-good-enough-personal-social-health-and-economic-education>
 - ⁹ <http://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/145/14502.htm>
 - ¹⁰ <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/news/pshe-association-raises-concerns-about-drop-pshe>
 - ¹¹ www.pshe-association.org.uk
 - ¹² <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/campaigns>
 - ¹³ <http://www.rcpsych.ac.uk/policyandparliamentary/parliamentandpublicaffairs/appgonmentalhealth.aspx>
 - ¹⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/chief-medical-officers-annual-report-2012-our-children-deserve-better-prevention-pays/cmos-annual-report-2012-our-children-deserve-better-cmos-summary-as-a-web-page>
 - ¹⁵ <http://www.parliament.uk/pshe-and-sre-in-schools-inquiry>
 - ¹⁶ <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/news/five-select-committee-chairs-call-government>
 - ¹⁷ <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/news/health-and-education-committees-call-compulsory>
 - ¹⁸ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/pshe-education-a-review-of-impact-and-effective-practice>
 - ¹⁹ onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/pits.21641/abstract
 - ²⁰ <http://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/14651858.CD008958.pub2/pdf>
 - ²¹ <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/curriculum-and-resources/resources/evidence-briefing-pshe-education-pupil-wellbeing>
 - ²² <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/not-yet-good-enough-personal-social-health-and-economic-education>
 - ²³ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/219638/DFE-RR253.pdf
 - ²⁴ <http://bit.ly/2jCVatZ>
 - ²⁵ http://jenni.uchicago.edu/papers/Heckman_2008_EI_v46_n3.pdf
 - ²⁶ https://www.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/182419/DFE-RR097.pdf
 - ²⁷ <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pubmed/21291449>
 - ²⁸ <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/news/children-and-social-work-bill-receives-royal>