

How to support and influence PSHE education

A guide for governing boards

April 2021



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National Governance Association

The National Governance Association (NGA) is the membership organisation for governors, trustees and clerks of state schools in England.

We are an independent, not-for-profit charity that aims to improve the educational standards and wellbeing of young people by increasing the effectiveness of governing boards and promoting high standards. We are expert leaders in school and trust governance, providing information, advice and guidance, professional development and e-learning.

We represent the views of governors, trustees and clerks at a national level and work closely with, and lobby, UK government and educational bodies.

Introduction

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is a school subject through which pupils develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to manage their lives, now and in the future. It plays a key role in safeguarding and supporting mental and physical health.

This guide is intended to support discussions between governing boards and school leaders about:

- Making PSHE education a fundamental part of a curriculum that supports the educational vision for their school or trust.
- How governing boards can influence and support the planning and delivery of PSHE education in schools and monitor its impact.

The guide has been produced in collaboration with the [PSHE Association](#), a national body, charity and membership organisation that supports a network of over 50,000 practitioners with teaching resources, guidance, advice and training.

1. About PSHE education

PSHE education is organised into the following themes:

- Health and wellbeing
- Relationships
- Living in the wider world (covering economic wellbeing and careers)

The subject incorporates topics linked to physical and mental health, alcohol and drugs, relationships and sex education, personal and online safety, first aid, economic wellbeing, and careers.

The Department for Education (DfE) expects PSHE education to be taught in all schools. Most schools use their PSHE education programme to meet the [legal requirement](#), in place as of September 2020, to teach Relationships Education and Health Education (at key stages 1 and 2) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (at key stages 3 and 4).

2. Why take an interest in PSHE education

Taking an active interest in and monitoring PSHE education will assure governing boards that their pupils are being taught:

- How to be safe in different situations, for example when they are online.
- How to maintain healthy lifestyles and address risks to their physical and mental health.
- About the world of work, economic wellbeing and careers.
- How to build healthy, positive relationships, including (at key stages 3 and 4) intimate relationships.
- How to safely challenge bullying and discrimination.

An [evidence review](#) carried out on behalf of the PSHE association has shown that PSHE education has a positive impact on academic attainment. It is key to providing a curriculum that is broad and balanced and helps to ensure other legal duties linked to safeguarding and equalities are met. School inspections carried out under the [current Ofsted framework](#) are particularly interested in how schools contribute to the personal development of pupils. This area is now a judgement in its own right.

The interest taken in PSHE education should extend beyond meeting legal requirements and promoting good academic outcomes. PSHE education – when taught well – should resonate with the values that governing boards foster, which guide the thinking and behaviour in their schools and trusts:

- What are we trying to achieve for our pupils?
- What should they leave the school knowing and being?

Useful resources

- [NGA guidance](#) on requirements for Relationships Education and RSE
 - [Making pupil mental wellbeing a priority](#): information, webinar and podcast
 - [DfE guidance](#) about teaching personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education.
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3. How to support and influence PSHE education

There are many ways in which governing boards, working at a strategic level, can raise the status of PSHE education and increase its impact. The following themes are intended to prompt discussions at governing board meetings and with senior executive leaders in your school or trust.

3.1 Link PSHE education to vision and strategy

Ensuring clarity of vision is the first of the three core functions for every governing board. The school's vision is reviewed annually and should, in a few sentences, describe what the school or trust will look like in three to five years' time. If the vision statement references the wellbeing, safeguarding, physical and emotional health, character, and resilience of pupils, as well as their academic attainment, then it provides a platform for governing boards and school/trust leadership teams to agree strategic goals that are linked to subject development and teaching in PSHE education.

3.2 Develop a bespoke PSHE policy

We recommend that school leaders develop a bespoke, written policy for PSHE education. A successful PSHE education policy will make clear:

- Where PSHE education fits in the curriculum offer.
- How it is delivered (eg curriculum time).
- How successful and effective delivery will be supported.

Policy also provides a framework for the governing board's monitoring of impact (see below).

Whilst a PSHE education policy is not a statutory requirement, schools must have a Relationships Education/Relationships and Sex Education policy in place (this could be included within the PSHE education policy). PSHE Association [guidance](#) supports schools writing their Relationships Education/RSE and PSHE education policies.

3.3 Engage stakeholders

Meaningful engagement with stakeholders – pupils, parents, staff and the wider school community – is a fundamental part of good governance. Seeking views through discussion, surveys and formal consultation can help to shape PSHE and RSE/Relationships Education. This engagement also promotes shared ownership of the vision for a curriculum which equips pupils for every aspect of their lives.

[DfE guidance](#) is clear that constructive dialogue should take place between schools and parents so that their views on PSHE and RSE/Relationships Education policy can be understood and taken into account.

We recommend governing boards promote this approach in their schools and trusts, whilst reassuring their leadership teams that engaging with stakeholders is a consultative process; the intention is not to implement their will without question. The governing board should listen to views and take a considered course of action which may at times differ from the feedback stakeholders provide.

3.4 Use PSHE education to keep pupils safe

The PSHE education curriculum addresses and helps protect pupils from issues such as: child sexual exploitation and other forms of abuse; sharing of sexual images; the impact of online pornography; the dangers of extremism and radicalisation, forced marriage, honour-based violence; and female genital mutilation. Governing boards, therefore, should seek assurance that PSHE education teaches pupils in their school or trust about safeguarding (ie how to help keep themselves and others safe) and supports them to embed a culture of responsibility aligned with the requirements of the statutory guidance [Keeping Children Safe in Education](#).

It is also important to consult [DfE guidance](#) on how to prevent and respond to reports of sexual violence and sexual harassment between pupils in school – DfE guidance explains the importance of PSHE education in addressing issues such as healthy and respectful relationships, and what respectful behaviour looks like.

3.5 Invest in resources and CPD

The governing board should be prepared to invest resources in ensuring that every pupil receives a good PSHE education that is tailored to their needs and based on an assessment.

Anyone leading or delivering PSHE education should be trained in the fundamentals of safe, effective practice. It is particularly important that teachers receive training on how to deliver PSHE education so that the content and methods used do not undermine important messages about health and wellbeing, relationships, and living in the wider world.

Day-to-day performance management of teachers is the responsibility of executive leaders. However, the governing board can play a part in encouraging and supporting teachers to develop their skills and knowledge. Boards should stay abreast of relevant issues and embed a whole school approach to teaching PSHE education. For example, governing boards may benefit from understanding the learning environment required for effective PSHE education and techniques used to assess pupils' learning and demonstrate progress.

3.6 Evaluate the impact of PSHE education

Evaluating the impact of PSHE education on outcomes for pupils requires careful consideration and discussion between governing boards and school leaders over:

- Ways of measuring the extent to which what is being taught is developing the knowledge, skills and attributes pupils require to stay healthy, safe and prepare them for life and work.
- The data and information available to measure progress and outcomes.
- Balancing the requirement for data, information and reports against other workload demands of staff.

It is important to recognise that whilst pupil progress and assessment evidence can help the governing board to evaluate the impact of PSHE teaching and learning, it is not the whole story. Governing boards benefit from taking a broader view, using information such as pupil and parent surveys (in which PSHE education themes are covered), attendance figures, family support data, post school destination data, as well as what they learn first-hand from visiting the school and talking to pupils and staff about their experiences.

Governing boards can use all, or a combination of, the following sources to monitor evidence of the impact of PSHE education in their schools and trusts:

- Reports from their senior executive leaders.
- Feedback received from a [link governor/trustee](#) for PSHE education.
- Feedback from [governor/trustee visits](#) with a PSHE education theme or focus.
- Analysis and scrutiny carried out at committee level (eg curriculum committee).
- Engagement with pupil and parent forums.

Useful resources

Find out about the CPD and support networks available to staff in your school or trust (such as those provided by the [PSHE Association](#)) and how CPD needs are met.

Designing the best curriculum with the resources available is a collaborative process that brings together the governance, education leadership and business support in a school/trust. You can find out more about this in NGA's [guidance](#) on integrated curriculum and financial planning (ICFP).

4. Questions governing boards can ask

The following are examples of the type of questions that governors and trustees might ask about PSHE education in their school or trust. Consider how you might use these examples to construct your own questions, specific to your context and the issue you are discussing.

- What are the relative strengths of our PSHE education curriculum: what are the areas we need to develop?
- Does our PSHE education curriculum include statutory RSHE content?
- How do we link PSHE education to subjects like science, citizenship, religious education and other subjects to complement the whole school curriculum?
- How are we supporting our staff (for example, through CPD) to stay abreast of the issues and help embed our approach to teaching PSHE education?
- In what ways do we engage with research, networks and expert organisations to build our capacity for teaching PSHE education?
- Can we point to examples of how our PSHE education curriculum benefits **all** our pupils?
- How is our PSHE education curriculum tailored and adapted to meet the needs of different groups of pupils, for example those pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)?
- What do our stakeholders, especially our pupils, think of our whole school approach to PSHE education? How do we know?
- Based on what we have learned, what should we be doing more of or doing differently?

Thank you for reading this guide. If you have any feedback you'd like to share, please email kcfeedback@nga.org.uk.

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