

**The Highland Council**  
**Education, Children and Adult Services Committee**  
**20 May 2015**

Agenda Item	15.
Report No	ECAS 44/15

**Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood**

**Report by Director of Care and Learning**

**Summary**

The purpose of this report is to update members about the most recent guidance being issued to schools on the conduct of Relationships, Sexual health and Parenthood Education. It takes into account the most recent guidance from the Scottish Government and the advice of a working party made up of teachers, Quality Improvement Officers and health professionals.

**1. Background**

- 1.1 Everyone who works in a school has a responsibility to support positive, respectful relationships with and between children and young people, and their mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing.
- 1.2 In providing programmes of sexual health education, local authorities should take account of Section 35 of the Ethical Standards in Public Life etc. (Scotland) Act 2000, which puts a duty on councils to have regard to:
  - the value of a stable family life in a child's development;
  - the need to ensure that the content of instructions provided by authorities is appropriate, having regard to each child's age, understanding and stage of development.
- 1.3 The Scottish Government issued further guidance for teachers in December 2014, on the conduct of teaching relationships, sexual health and parenthood education within the Health and Wellbeing organiser of Curriculum for Excellence.
- 1.4 The updated guidance is also in relation to the Marriage and Civil Partnership (Scotland) Bill. This legislation allows two people of the same sex to marry. It also takes into account the repeal in 2000 of Section 28 of the Local Government Act, 1986, and means that it is legal and permissible to discuss homosexuality in schools.

**2. Delivery of Relationships, Sexual Health and Parenthood Education**

- 2.1 Relationships, sexual health and parenthood (RSHP) education forms a key part of Health and Wellbeing within Curriculum for Excellence. RSHP education focuses on equipping children and young people with the knowledge, skills and attributes to enable them to form relationships in a responsible and healthy manner. This is an important part of preparation for adult life. Children and

young people develop an understanding of how to maintain positive relationships with a variety of people and are aware of how thoughts, feelings, attitudes values and beliefs can influence decisions about relationships and sexual health. They also develop their understanding of the complex role and responsibilities of being a parent or carer.

- 2.2 The purpose of RSHP education is to provide knowledge and understanding of the nature of sexuality, sexual wellbeing and the processes of human reproduction within the context of relationships based upon love and respect. It is important that learning about RSHP should be well matched to the children and young people's needs and levels of maturity. Educational materials should be selected with great care and sensitivity to the age and understanding of children and young people and be informed by evidence. As part of on-going work to support schools in all areas of Health and Wellbeing, Highland Council has produced a list of recommended resources for schools to use.
- 2.3 RSHP education should present facts in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner, within a framework of sound values and an awareness of the law on sexual behaviour. Children and young people should be encouraged to appreciate the values of a stable and loving family life, parental responsibility and the importance of family relationships in planning for and bringing up children and in offering them security, stability, happiness and love. Children and young people should also be encouraged to appreciate the value of commitment in relationships and partnerships including marriage. At the same time, teachers must respect and avoid causing hurt or offence to those who come from various family backgrounds. All children and young people should be encouraged to understand the importance of self-restraint, dignity and respect for themselves and the views of others.
- 2.4 Children and young people should be encouraged to recognise the risks, the physical, emotional and moral implications of certain types of behaviour and to accept that both sexes must behave responsibly. Where appropriate, young people should be made aware of local sexual health/young people's services and how these can be accessed. Highland Council provides professional development for those delivering RSHP education, and this is available through the Continuing Professional Development website.
- 2.5 The Highland Council working group has produced a series of frameworks to support schools in the delivery of RSHP. Each framework follows a standard format which is designed to offer guidance, suggestions and support to teachers as they deliver Health and Wellbeing in their classrooms. The frameworks are not intended to be prescriptive.
- 2.6 Discretion is left to each teacher as to when particular areas of the frameworks are delivered, based on the maturity and development of the children they are teaching but each framework has been designed to define the expected learning at each stage. The aim is to provide schools with a guide to the delivery of a progressive programme of learning covering all aspects of Health and Wellbeing and this can be refined as part of a whole school policy that has been consulted on with parents and carers.

2.7 Guidance has also been issued on Violence against Women, and similar frameworks have been produced for other aspects of Health and Wellbeing, such as substance misuse.

### **3. Developing a whole school policy and informing parents and carers**

3.1 Parents and carers play a key role in all aspects of their children's education. It is good practice for schools to inform and consult parents and carers about key aspects of the curriculum. This is particularly important in relation to RSHP education. All schools should adopt the practice of consulting parents and carers when they are developing or reviewing their programme of RSHP education. All parents and carers should be given the opportunity in advance to view key teaching materials and to ask questions about any aspect of the programme. Schools should also give children and young people an opportunity to identify and express their educational needs in this area.

3.2 In preparing programmes and in consulting with parents and carers and responding to their views, schools should be sensitive to parental concerns and to cultural views and religious beliefs which may be held, and which may conflict with particular aspects of the planned programme.

3.3 While it is a nationally accepted part of the existing and agreed curricular framework for Scottish schools and of children young people's educational entitlement, there is no statutory requirement for participation in a programme of RSHP education. Schools must therefore be sensitive to the cases in which a parent or carer may wish to withdraw a child or young person from all or part of a planned sexual health education element within a RSHP education programme. Discussion with the parent or carer should attempt to clarify the purposes of the programme, and encourage them to see participation in the programme as a positive and constructive part of their child's education and development.

3.4 The child and young person's views must also be taken into account, given their statutory right to an education. However, in the event of a parent or carer concluding that he or she wishes to withdraw their child from sexual health education lessons, arrangements should be made for the child or young person to have alternative positive educational provision. This advice applies only to specific programmes of sexual health education. Aspects of RSHP education may be discussed in many areas of the curriculum and it would not be possible for a child or young person to be withdrawn from lessons across the curriculum as this would prevent a child or young person receiving an adequate and holistic education.

3.5 Arrangements should be in place to respond promptly and fully to any concerns which parents and carers may express about the content or teaching approaches within a RSHP education programme. In the first instance, they should be encouraged to raise concerns directly with the school involved as soon as possible so that matters can be resolved promptly. Mechanisms for prompt referral at local authority level should be provided in cases where a parent or carer remains dissatisfied after consultation with the school. Schools

should make arrangements for raising concerns clear in the school handbook.

#### **4. Implications**

- 4.1 There are no resource, risk, climate change/carbon clever, Gaelic or rural implications arising from this report. The equalities and legal implications are listed in section 1.
- 4.2 Guidance for RSHP education for pupils who may find the content difficult to access has been issued by Education Scotland.

#### **5. Recommendation**

- 5.1 Members are asked to note the guidance being issued to schools on the conduct of RSHP education.

Designation: Director of Care and Learning

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