

Education Committee inquiry into PSHE and SRE in schools

Written evidence submitted by Childnet International

Executive Summary

1. As a children's internet safety charity we have been pleased to see the inclusion of internet safety issues within the new Computing curriculum. However, it is important to go further than this. We strongly recommend that issues such as sexting, pornography, peer pressure online, cyberbullying and online sexual exploitation are addressed within SRE and PSHE, and see a real need for the government to update its statutory SRE guidance and support statutory PSHE provision.
2. In light of the unprecedented changes to childhood as a result of the rapid development of the internet and digital technology, we believe it is essential that the government's statutory guidance on SRE is updated to reflect the impact of digital technology on sex and relationships. This will help ensure that all schools cover these issues and will support them in doing this.
3. More broadly than SRE, PSHE lessons allow an exploration of wider issues surrounding the safe and positive use of technology, from key online risks such as cyberbullying to a discussion of healthy digital behaviours, privacy and online reputation, and safe social networking.
4. Statutory PSHE provision would ensure that all schools are supported to deliver good quality PSHE education, by setting out expectations and ensuring the subject is prioritised. Highlighting topics such as cyberbullying in the Programmes of Study would help to ensure that provision in schools across the UK is delivered to the same high standard.

About Childnet

5. Childnet's aim is to make the internet a great and safe place for children and young people. Set up in 1995, Childnet is an independent charity that seeks to promote the positive opportunities for creativity, fun and learning offered by technology, while also making sure that children can navigate the internet safely.
6. Childnet's Education Team have for the past ten years delivered education sessions in primary and secondary schools across the UK to help young people make good decisions whenever and wherever they are using technology. In the last academic year, Childnet staff visited 176 schools, (running on average 3 sessions in each school), and spoke with 21,000 children, 2,500 parents and 1,400 school staff.
7. Childnet has produced a range of successful and award winning resources designed to empower the whole school community. In particular, Childnet has previously worked closely with the DoE/DCSF/DfE, BECTA and the TDA on strategic educational projects including the award winning 'Know IT All' suite of resources for primary, secondary, parents, and for NQTs and trainee teachers – over 2 million copies of the KIA for parents CDROM resource were requested and distributed to schools across the UK. Childnet also works to develop tailored resources to help protect young people who are most vulnerable online. Childnet is currently working with Leicester City Council on a project

to support young people with autism spectrum disorder, and another resource with Islington Council for foster carers and adoptive parents.

8. In January 2011, Childnet was appointed by the European Commission to be a partner in the UK's Safer Internet Centre, together with two leading charities, the Internet Watch Foundation and the South West Grid for Learning. As part of this work, Childnet helps to coordinate Safer Internet Day in the UK. Safer Internet Day 2014 reached millions in the UK, and was supported by the Prime Minister and 650 organisations including the DCMS, DfE, and the governments of Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.
9. Childnet works to influence best practice and policy in education and the internet industry, both in the UK and internationally. In 2007, Childnet was commissioned by the DCSF to produce guidance for schools about preventing and responding to cyberbullying.¹ We continue to ensure that young people's voices are heard by policymakers and the internet industry. We champion a whole-community approach to internet safety and continue to call for the inclusion of internet safety in the curriculum, both in Computing and PSHE, and across all subjects.

Sex and relationships education

10. In light of the unprecedented changes to childhood as a result of the rapid development of the internet and digital technology, we believe it is essential that the government's statutory guidance on SRE is updated to reflect the impact of digital technology on sex and relationships. This will help ensure that all schools cover these issues and will support them in doing this.
11. Sex and relationships education is essential for children's wellbeing, helping to ensure they have healthy relationships, body image and self-esteem, and that they know how to safeguard themselves from sexual exploitation, relationship abuse and other harm.
12. For today's young people, experiences around sex and relationships are hugely influenced by the internet and digital technology, which play such an important role in young people's lives. It is essential that schools ensure that their sex and relationships education is fit for the 21st century, covering issues such as pornography, sexting and healthy digital relationships.
13. Sexual or pornographic content is easy to find – online, in advertising, music videos and wider – and it is incredibly important that we facilitate discussions with children about the issues surrounding exposure to this kind of content. A 2014 academic report² found that 17% of UK children aged 9-16 have seen sexual images online or offline in the last year, with over half saying they had been upset by these images. We welcome the recommendations included in the 2014 Supplementary Guidance³ by Brook, the PSHE Association and the Sex Education Forum, which encourages schools to address issues surrounding pornography, stating that “pornography can depict a lack of communication about choices, sexual consent and contraception, and often shows violent and oppressive behaviours towards women, which can be frightening and confusing, and make young people feel pressured to behave in particular ways.” (p11). It is important that schools provide an alternative narrative to the content children are being exposed to online, and help young people critically assess pornographic content and safeguard themselves.
14. Sexting, the sending of sexually explicit images, also needs to be discussed with young people. In our education sessions, we use our drama activity Picture This⁴ to help young people explore the potential consequences of sending sexual images and to think about their responsibilities to not share images more widely or to pressure others into sending

such images. We also discuss the law and how it is illegal to produce, possess or distribute an indecent image of a person under 18. With a reported 60% of teenagers being asked online for a sexual image or video of themselves, it is clearly an issue we need to be helping young people with⁵. Furthermore, young people need to recognise grooming behaviours and know to report to CEOP and tell a trusted adult if they are asked by an adult to share indecent images or carry out sexual acts on a webcam. A 2014 report² found that 1 in 20 UK children aged 11-16 years have received a sexual message online, and 17% of UK children aged 9-16 have chatted to strangers online. It is urgent that we educate all children about these risks to avoid tragic cases such as the suicide of British teenager Daniel Perry⁶ who had been blackmailed after being tricked into making explicit webcam recordings.

15. It is also important to discuss healthy relationships in the context of digital technology. Young people can feel pressured by partners to communicate frequently or share passwords; and jealousies and control can be a real problem online. In May 2014, the Crown Prosecution Service published proposed guidelines about the way the CPS considers domestic violence cases.⁷ Director of Public Prosecutions, Alison Saunders, said: "Some teenagers may not consider themselves victims of domestic violence, especially if they are not being physically abused but are being targeted on social media for example. Abuse often takes place online in cases involving teenagers and young people. It is vital that this type of evidence is considered as part of any case and that both prosecutors and investigators adopt the full definition of domestic violence that includes non-physical abuse such as this." We need to ensure that young people recognise signs of digital relationship abuse and know where to seek help.
16. These issues can be addressed in an age-appropriate way at primary school to ensure that children know how to safeguard themselves. For example, lessons could discuss appropriate behaviours surrounding technology, so that children know that it is not okay for someone to take pictures of their private parts, or show them rude films or other things that make them feel uncomfortable.
17. Despite the urgent need to help children safeguard themselves against harm online, we know that school provision is patchy when it comes to including digital issues in SRE. In Ofsted's 2013 report *Not Yet Good Enough*⁸, the lack of education about online risks such as pornography was highlighted. It concluded that "The failure to include discussion of pornography is concerning as research shows that children as young as nine are increasingly accessing pornographic internet sites, and ChildLine counsellors have confirmed an increase to more than 50 calls a month from teenagers upset by pornography." (p23)
18. We welcome the supplementary guidance³ published by Brook, the PSHE Association and the Sex Education Forum this year, and strongly support the inclusion of issues such as pornography and sexting as part of SRE.
19. While this is a good starting point, we think it is imperative that the Department for Education updates its published statutory SRE guidance to ensure that all schools include digital issues in their sex and relationships education in both primary and secondary schools. This is supported by parents; a 2013 NAHT survey found that 83% of parents felt that pornography should be included in SRE in school, and only 7% think it is never appropriate to raise issues of pornography in a school setting.⁹ The government has taken a number of progressive steps to ensure that children are safer online; this is an important next step to ensure that schools are fully supported to deliver effective education about staying safe online.
20. In 2000, the DfEE's SRE guidance explained that it was "particularly important today because of the many different and conflicting pressures on young people". Almost

fifteen years later, these pressures are even greater, and young people need more help to navigate their complex digital lives safely.

Personal, Social, Health and Economic education

21. More broadly than SRE, PSHE lessons allow an exploration of wider issues surrounding the safe and positive use of technology, from key online risks such as cyberbullying to a discussion of healthy digital behaviours, privacy and online reputation, and safe social networking.
22. However, we know that currently the quality of PSHE provision varies and that digital issues are not always addressed. In Ofsted's 2013 report *Not Yet Good Enough*⁸, it was reported that in schools where teaching in PSHE education required improvement, education about online safety was not covered in enough detail. "In some schools, pupils understood the importance of using security settings when using social networking sites but did not know how to actually set them or had not bothered to do so." (p14).
23. We welcome the inclusion of the safe, respectful and responsible use of technology in the programmes of study for the Computing curriculum at KS1, 2, 3 and 4. However, it is also important that these issues are addressed within PSHE lessons and that teachers feel trained and equipped to effectively address these sensitive issues. E-safety is a subject that is best addressed and reinforced by teaching opportunities in different subjects. We support the Government's inclusion of e-safety in the Computing curriculum, but do not see it as the sole responsibility of the Computing department, and see the best outcomes if these issues are addressed cross curricula. PSHE and SRE provide the best opportunity to cover these sensitive issues.
24. Statutory PSHE provision would ensure that all schools are supported to deliver good quality PSHE education, by setting out expectations and ensuring the subject is prioritised. Highlighting topics such as cyberbullying in the Programmes of Study would help to ensure that provision in schools across the UK is delivered to the same high standard. Currently, schools are being inspected by Ofsted without clear guidance from the government on what constitutes good PSHE education.
25. Statutory guidance would also ensure that schools place priority on giving PSHE education teachers subject-specific training to teach sensitive issues such as pornography and sexting. This is currently not the case. In 2013, Ofsted⁸ highlighted that in 20% of schools, staff had received little or no training to teach PSHE education (and consequently, teaching was not good in any of these schools).
26. It is essential that we ensure that young people are equipped to protect themselves from harm online. The latest research² demonstrates the range of risks that young people are exposed to online. 12% of 9-16s have been cyberbullied, with 21% saying they had been treated in hurtful or nasty way online. 17% of 11-16s have seen websites where people discuss ways of physically harming or hurting themselves, with 1 in 25 having seen suicide websites. 14% of 11-16s have seen sites that promote eating disorders; rising to over 1 in 5 young people aged 13-14 years. It is essential that we address a wide range of internet safety issues in PSHE to promote young people's wellbeing and protect them from harm.
27. Both young people and their parents are calling for PSHE education in school. Ofsted (2013) reported that 86% of pupils who responded to their online survey agreed that they need to be taught about these things in school⁸. In 2013, the NAHT (National Association of Head Teachers) published the results of a survey⁹ that found that the vast

majority of parents (88%) said sex education and lessons on adult and peer relationships should be mandatory in schools, and 83% of parents felt that pornography should be included as part of sex education.

Conclusion

28. Childnet see that education is the most important factor when it comes to keeping children and young people safe on the internet – technical tools are important, but education is even more so. This is a view that is reinforced by young people themselves. The Culture Media and Sport Committee inquiry into online safety¹⁰ heard from a group of eight young people who shared their experiences of online bullying and access to age-inappropriate material, particularly adult pornography, with the discussion facilitated by Childnet. As the report states: “The young people said providing them with the knowledge, tools and confidence to navigate potential online dangers would ultimately be more beneficial than technical measures.” There has been a real policy focus on technical tools in the last two years, so we are pleased that this inquiry provides an opportunity to highlight the need for internet safety education across the school curriculum, including PSHE and SRE, as this is the most important way to ensure young people are safe online.

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References

¹ Childnet’s cyberbullying guidance [Hyperlink](#)

² Mascheroni & Ólafsson (2014) Net Children Go Mobile: risks and opportunities [Hyperlink](#)

³ Brook, the Sex Education Forum & the PSHE Association (2014) Sex and Relationships Education for the 21st Century: Supplementary advice [Hyperlink](#)

⁴ Childnet educational resource ‘Picture This’ [Hyperlink](#)

⁵ NSPCC: ChildLine tackling sexting with The Internet Watch Foundation, Survey of ChildLine web visitors [Hyperlink](#)

⁶ BBC (2013) Teenager’s death sparks cyber-blackmailing probe [Hyperlink](#)

⁷ Crown Prosecution Service (2014) [Hyperlink](#)

⁸ Ofsted (2013) Not yet good enough: personal, social, health and economic education in schools [Hyperlink](#)

⁹ National Association of Headteachers (2013) [Hyperlink](#)

¹⁰ Culture Media and Sport Committee inquiry into online safety [Hyperlink](#)