



Llywodraeth Cymru  
Welsh Government

## **Response to the Estyn thematic report: A review of healthy relationships education**

Mae'r ddogfen yma hefyd ar gael yn Gymraeg.  
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**Report title: A Review of Healthy Relationships Education**

**(June 2017)**

**Report Details**

The Estyn report *A Review of Healthy Relationships Education* was published in June 2017 in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government in the Minister's annual remit letter to Estyn for 2016/2017.

The report evaluated the quality of provision for healthy relationships education in schools in Wales. It identified strategies to support schools in improving provision and outcomes for pupils.

**Context:**

The findings and recommendations in this report draw on:

- evidence from inspection outcomes
- evidence from a survey questionnaire
- visits to schools
- interviews with representatives of specialist agencies

The thirteen schools selected for visits were identified as having strong practice in aspects of healthy relationships education as a result of Estyn inspections.

Information was also provided by a further thirteen primary, eight secondary and one special school through an on line survey questionnaire. The sample takes account of geographical location, socio-economic background, size of school and linguistic contexts.

**Main findings:**

- The content and delivery of healthy relationships education varies too widely in schools across Wales. Overall, schools do not allocate enough time or importance to this subject.
- Schools that are most effective in delivering healthy relationships education create an ethos where pupils understand the importance of equality and respect the rights of others. In these schools, pupils build resilience and grow in self-esteem and confidence.
- All of the schools surveyed as part of this report teach pupils about healthy digital relationships through e-safety education. As a result, pupils develop age appropriate awareness and understanding of important issues such as cyber-bullying, grooming and protecting

personal information on-line.

- Nearly all schools teach pupils about gender equality. All secondary and many primary schools teach pupils about domestic abuse. However, not all schools teach pupils about forms of violence against women such as forced marriage, female genital mutilation and honour-based violence. Too many schools, particularly in areas where communities are not diverse, do not recognise issues of violence against women as high priority. They do not prepare pupils well enough to live in a diverse society.
- Evidence from Estyn inspections shows that nearly all Year 6 pupils in primary schools receive sex and relationships education (SRE). Increasingly, primary schools are extending this provision into Year 5 to reflect the fact that some children reach puberty at a younger age. In many primary schools, SRE is delivered by trained and experienced health professionals. A minority of schools avoid teaching aspects of sex and relationships education, other than puberty. Many of these schools leave the teaching of personal hygiene and puberty solely to NHS health professionals in one-off sessions.
- In secondary schools, there is a wide variation in planning and provision for healthy relationships education. In many secondary schools, form tutors teach this subject within personal and social education (PSE) sessions as part of the tutorial system. In most secondary schools healthy relationships education features as part of the PSE curriculum at key stage 3. However, a few schools surveyed do not have discrete PSE lessons at key stage 4. These schools promote healthy relationships education during themed days, assemblies and as part of the Welsh Baccalaureate. Schools that deliver healthy relationships education in stand-alone assemblies, themed days or small blocks of lessons in discrete subjects do not give pupils enough opportunity to explore important social and emotional aspects of relationships.
- Many schools make effective use of specialist agencies to deliver important aspects of healthy relationships education. Specialist agencies provide schools with a wide range of support including training for staff, age-appropriate lessons for pupils and signposting victims to appropriate support. Where schools liaise effectively with specialist agencies, together, they provide comprehensive coverage of healthy relationships education including age appropriate work on domestic abuse, violence against women and sexual violence.
- In schools with the best practice, teachers supplement the input of health professionals and specialist agencies well to plan activities for

pupils to explore important aspects of healthy relationships in lessons across the curriculum.

- Most schools have arrangements in place to support pupils who have experienced domestic abuse or sexual violence. Many schools in the survey have formed valuable strategic partnerships with specialist agencies that provide appropriate support and advice for pupils. Experimental statistics produced by Welsh Government (2016) on the provision of counselling services across Wales shows that 11,567 children received counselling in 2014 – 2015. Nearly half of all referrals were made by school staff with the most common form of presenting issue being around relationships within families. A few primary schools in the survey have used additional funding to extend counselling services beyond year 6 to include pupils throughout the school.
- Generally, arrangements for pupils to influence what they learn in healthy relationships education are underdeveloped in schools across Wales. In the very few schools where pupils are ambassadors of gender equality, pupils act as champions of healthy relationships, provide peer-to-peer support and make an important contribution to preventative work in school and the wider community.
- Generally, schools in culturally diverse communities build strong relationships with parents and community leaders. This helps to improve parental engagement with the school, reduce cultural tensions and promote an ethos where diversity is respected.
- There is support from all schools and agencies visited as part of the survey to include healthy relationships education as part of the health and wellbeing area of learning in the curriculum reform being planned under 'Successful Futures' (Donaldson 2015).
- Many specialist agencies believe that the aims of the Violence against Women, Domestic Abuse and Sexual Violence Act (Wales) 2015 (VAWDASV Act 2015) will not be fully realised without statutory guidance for schools that sets out a core curriculum for healthy relationships education that all children are entitled to receive.
- Most school leaders are not aware of Welsh Government guidance and toolkits to support the delivery of healthy relationships education and implement a whole school approach to preventing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence. Generally, there are too many guidance documents for schools outlining aspects of personal social education, sex and relationships education and equality and diversity.

- Only a very few governing bodies have acted upon the guidance set out in the Welsh Government practical guide for governors, 'Violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (Welsh Government 2016).
- Only a very few school staff have completed the level 1 online training from the National Training Framework. Generally, school leaders are not aware of the content and requirements of the National Training Framework for violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence.

### **Estyn's recommendations**

These recommendations are aimed at schools, regional consortia, local authorities and the Welsh Government. The recommendations target the embedding of sex and relationship education (SRE) and the VAWDASV Act in the current and new curriculum, whole school approaches to SRE and training for staff.

### **Recommendations**

#### **Schools should:**

**R1** Implement Welsh Government guidance to provide a whole-school approach to preventing violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence (Welsh Government, 2015)

**R2** Ensure that key messages around healthy relationships are embedded in the curriculum and reinforced regularly

**R3** Build on the best practice identified in this report

#### **Local authorities and regional consortia should:**

**R4** Ensure that all staff who work in schools complete the training set out in the National Training Framework (Welsh Government, 2016a)

#### **The Welsh Government should:**

**R5** Publicise guidance further to ensure that schools and governing bodies are aware of the advice and guidance they contain

**R6** Ensure that those involved in curriculum design and development for the health and wellbeing area of learning and experiences are aware of the important role schools have in implementing the VAWDASV Act 2015 (National Assembly for Wales, 2015) and include healthy relationships education in their work

**R7** Provide access for staff who work in independent schools and colleges to the National Training Framework (Welsh Government, 2016a)

**WG response:**

We accept the recommendations and welcome this report as an important source of evidence to support us in ensuring that schools are able to deliver high quality Sex and Relationship Education provision.

Pioneer schools are currently developing the new curriculum, taking forward the recommendations set out in Professor Graham Donaldson's Independent Review of Curriculum and Assessment Arrangements in Wales, Successful Futures.

The 4 purposes of the new curriculum in Wales are that children and young people develop as:

- ambitious capable learners;
- healthy confident individuals;
- enterprising and creative contributors; and
- ethical and informed citizens.

The new curriculum will be organised across six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE), one of which will be Health and Wellbeing. These purposes, along with the Health and Wellbeing AoLE, put the maintenance of physical and mental health and social relationships at the heart of learning for all young people in Wales which references a commitment to ensuring that the school setting is a healthy setting, where children and young people's education can be supported by a holistic approach to health and well-being.

In December 2016, the Cabinet Secretary for Education established a Sex and Relationship Expert Panel to help inform the development of the future Sex and Relationships (SRE) element of the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning Experience (AoLE) and identify issues and opportunities which could inform decisions around supporting the teaching profession deliver high quality SRE in schools more effectively.

In November 2017, the panel will publish its recommendations, based on robust evidence, including the Estyn report - *A Review of Healthy Relationships Education*.

Professor Emma Renold, Chair of the Sex and Relationships Expert Panel, will support pioneer schools in their development of the Health and Wellbeing Area of Learning and Experience.

This will ensure that the key findings, international evidence base, best practice and recommendations of both the Estyn report and the SRE Expert Panel continue to inform the development of the new curriculum.

Welsh Government also continues to draw advice and expertise from the Personal and Social Education (PSE) Advisory Group. This group, which includes representatives from a number of health, education and youth work organisations, provides government with a valuable insight into how PSE

related issues are delivered in schools and how its delivery can be supported and enhanced.

The Welsh Government are reviewing the use of Hwb as a potential platform through which the VAWDASV e-learning can be shared, particularly to ensure it can be utilised by education staff, including those in the independent school sector. We are also undertaking some initial scoping work with FE institutions to consider how the e-learning can be utilised by this audience. We will continue to work with Local Authorities and the WLGA to improve availability of the e-learning.

The Welsh Government will ensure that the Whole Education Approach Good Practice Guidance and the Guide for Governors are publicised more widely and will also ensure regular information is provided via Dysg.

### **Publication Details**

The report was published on 23 June 2017 and can be found on Estyn's website: <https://www.estyn.gov.wales/thematic-reports/review-healthy-relationships-education>