

Relationships and Sexuality Education: Consultation Booklet

About you:

The Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) is the largest Teachers' Union in Ireland with over 50,000 members. 7,200 of those are teachers in Nursery, Primary and Post-primary schools in all sectors in Northern Ireland.

This response is on behalf of these 7,200+ members.

Nuala O'Donnell is the contact for this consultation within INTO.

SECTION A: CONSULTATION ON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S GUIDANCE ON THE CHANGE TO LEGISLATION – CURRICULAR CONTENT AT KEY STAGES 3 AND 4

The Statement below is seeking your views about how the legislation at Key Stages 3 and 4 affecting the curriculum, as outlined by the Secretary of State, should be implemented in schools.

1. **The content of teaching and learning resources for Learning for Life and Work developed by CCEA** should be factual and contain age-appropriate, comprehensive, and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion and these resources should **not advocate, or oppose, a particular view on the moral and ethical considerations of abortion or contraception.**

Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
X		

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (OPTIONAL) The space below is for you to add any additional comments should you wish to provide more detail in respect of the Statement above.

It is important that this information is available to all pupils who wish to learn about these issues. However, while the resources and the teaching should ***'not advocate, or oppose, a particular view on the moral and ethical considerations of abortion or contraception'***, it is also important that all the alternatives are also included in the content as well as the potential knock-on effects for physical and mental health now and in the future. The pupils need to be aware of the potential psychological effects of abortion. All of this information is critical to enable young people to make informed decisions for themselves.

The ETI report on 'The Preventative Curriculum in Schools and EOTAS Centres' published in April 2023, recommended next steps states that:

'It is critical that all stakeholders, led by DE and its professional advisors in CCEA, should:

- agree key principles around what makes an effective preventative curriculum.*

work towards developing curriculum delivery models which are in keeping with the aims of the statutory NI curriculum; and

- ensure all children and young people can access a preventative curriculum which is agile, contemporary, relevant, and useful in their lives now and in the future.'*

The Secretary of State has ignored the recommendations of the ETI and introduced legislation which will potentially (and in many cases, very likely) cause unnecessary issues and conflicts among staffs, parents, and pupils.

The preventative curriculum, including considerations of abortion and contraception, must sit within the NI curriculum and be resourced and facilitated by the DE and EA to do so. As stated on page 8 of the ETI Report:

The content and delivery of the preventative curriculum can be emotive and is one of the few areas of the curriculum that crosses into family and moral thinking; school/centres need to be supported to deliver the preventative curriculum in a consistent manner which enables their pupils to think critically about a wide range of issues in an ever-changing world.

SECTION B: CONSULTATION ON DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION'S GUIDANCE TO SUPPORT THE CHANGE TO LEGISLATION – PARENTAL OPT-OUT FROM LESSON(S) ON SEXUAL AND REPRODUCTIVE HEALTH AND RIGHTS COVERING PREVENTION OF EARLY PREGNANCY AND ACCESS TO ABORTION

- 2. Parents/carers should be informed about the specific nature and content of the age-appropriate, comprehensive, and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.**

Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
	X	

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (OPTIONAL)

The space below is for you to add any additional comments should you wish to provide more detail in respect of the Statement above.

Parents have access to the content and learning resources developed by CCEA, as available on their website. Parents are given information by the school annually in relation to the content of the various subjects that are taught in the school. Therefore, it seems unnecessary for parents to receive further information on ***‘the specific nature and content of the age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.’*** This is potentially giving a prominence to a very small and specific area of the curriculum which is already very sensitive and could therefore be damaging.

3. **The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child**³ includes at Articles 1-3 and 12 the rights of the child to **‘express their views, feelings and wishes in all matters affecting them, and to have their views considered and taken seriously’** and at Article 5 **‘the rights and responsibilities of parents and carers to provide guidance and direction to their child as they grow up so that they fully enjoy their rights. This must be done in a way that recognises the child’s increasing capacity to make their own choices.’** The Department’s guidance, when developed, should consider in such instances how schools balance the rights of both children and parents/carers in implementing the regulations.

Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
X		

It is critical that *‘The Department’s guidance, when developed, should consider in such instances how schools balance the rights of both children and parents/carers in implementing the regulations.’* Schools need very clear guidance on how to balance these rights and be supported by DE and EA in so doing in individual circumstances. The guidance needs to be clear in relation to how schools are to facilitate pupils if they or their parents wish them to withdraw from these lessons, where do the pupils go, who is responsible for them during this time and of they are to be supervised, to resource schools to do so.

the ETI report on *‘The Preventative Curriculum in Schools and EOTAS Centres’* published in April 2023 states in its conclusion: *‘It is clear from the questionnaire responses that pupils want impartial information and education on these sensitive areas which is integrated and reinforced throughout the curriculum and a school/centre culture based on respect and personal responsibility.’*

Schools must be supported and facilitated to provide this information to pupils.

4. Pupils and parents/carers should have access to an overview of their school’s RSE policy and planned RSE programme.

Agree	Neither Agree nor Disagree	Disagree
	X	

ADDITIONAL COMMENTS (OPTIONAL) The space below is for you to add any additional comments should you wish to provide more detail in respect of the Statement above.

Schools currently provide information to parents about the curriculum and subjects pupils are being taught through a variety of mediums, the schools’ prospectus, website, information provided to parents at parents’ evenings and parent teacher meetings. There should be no difference in relation to the schools’ RSE policy/ planned programme. Parents need to trust schools and teachers who are committed to providing the best education they can for the pupils in their care. We should be building on this trust and fostering respect and value for teaching as a profession, not seeking to undermine it. Parents should also not be placed in a position where they get to determine policy in schools. The Board of Governors are entrusted to act in the best interests of the pupils in their school.

Schools didn’t determine this regulation, but they are being required to implement it and to do so they need to be resourced and protected in so doing. If parents have complaints about the regulation, they should take their complaints to the Secretary of State and not the schools.

It is also critical that DE take account of the ETI report on ‘The Preventative Curriculum in Schools and EOTAS Centres’ published in April 2023, which calls for teachers to be properly trained –

‘There are too few opportunities for teachers to develop, or regularly refresh, the skills and expertise required to deliver an effective preventative curriculum, in particular aspects of RSE, that meets the needs of the pupils. The work needs to be accompanied by a comprehensive, high-quality programme of teacher professional learning to support teachers to deliver the more sensitive topics across the preventative curriculum.’ (page 7)