

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP



HOUSE OF COMMONS

LONDON SW1A 0AA

March 2017

Dear Constituent,

Thank you for contacting me about personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE).

Schools should be providing all young people with a curriculum that equips them for success in adult life. Relationships and Sex Education (RSE), relationships education, and PSHE are subjects designed to ensure pupils are taught the knowledge and life skills they will need to stay safe and develop healthy and supportive relationships.

The national curriculum makes it clear that all schools should teach PSHE, drawing on good practice to enable children to acquire the knowledge and skills they need to manage their lives, now and in the future. To allow teachers the flexibility to deliver high-quality PSHE education, it is currently a non-statutory subject, and there is no specified programme of study. However, I am pleased that the Government has introduced new clauses to the Children and Social Work Bill that would allow PSHE to be made a mandatory subject in all state-funded schools in England if this is considered appropriate in the future. Independent schools are already required to teach PSHE.

PSHE is exceptionally important, and I know work is underway to improve both its consistency and quality. Although teachers decide what is right for their students, PSHE teaching must equip pupils with a sound understanding of risk and with the knowledge and skills necessary to make safe and informed decisions. This can include teaching about consent in relationships to help children stay safe and to avoid inappropriate or harmful experiences. It may also include topics such as bullying, first aid, violence against women, female genital mutilation, mental health, "honour" violence and life skills.

SRE is currently compulsory in maintained secondary schools, and primary teachers may judge whether to teach it to primary children in later years. Academies and free schools are encouraged to teach it, and many do. However, the Government has introduced amendments to the Children and Social Work Bill that would rename the current sex education subject to 'relationships and sex education' and make it mandatory for all secondary maintained schools, academies and independent schools in England. Relationships and sex education must always be appropriate for the children concerned, in view of their age and religious background. The Department for Education will consult with key groups to develop subject content that is age



appropriate and addresses mental wellbeing, consent, resilience, and keeping safe online. A full public consultation on the regulations and statutory guidance will be launched later this year.

I know that the new measures allow parents to retain the right to withdraw their child from sex education within RSE in secondary schools (other than sex education in the National Curriculum as part of science). However, this will not apply to relationships education at primary school level. The Secretary of State has agreed to consult further in order to clarify the age at which a young person may have the right to make their own decisions.

It is important to make sure that our young people have the right information and right advice, and that what we teach them is fit for the world that children live in today. Starting at an early age so that children can understand relationships with one another, is sensible. However, the proposals are not to make sex education compulsory in primary schools. I also agree teaching must remain age-appropriate. I am encouraged that the Government has introduced amendments to the Children and Social Work Bill that would introduce a new subject, 'relationships education', to primary schools that would teach young children about healthy relationships and staying safe.

I am encouraged by the moves to improve the provision on PSHE and relationship education, particularly with a focus on improving quality and accessibility, and I will follow the progress of this issue with great interest.

Once again, thank you for taking the time to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

CHRIS HEATON-HARRIS MP
MEMBER OF PARLIAMENT FOR DAVENTRY