

Chapter: Diversity and Discrimination

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Introduction

Personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education is an important aspect of the secondary curriculum that can often be squeezed out and diluted at the expense of core subjects. The hidden or as Dr Neil Hawkes (2018) calls it the 'inner' curriculum is more important now, than ever before, as we ground ourselves post-Brexit, post-Covid and in the wake of increased hate crimes. We are two years on from George Floyd's murder, a moment of awakening for the school system who jumped to attention to commit to diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) approaches. But in 24 months, how much of the intention has had real impact? DEI starts with the culture and the ethos of our schools, spanning throughout the curriculum and underpinning every policy and practice. DEI needs to be a whole school strategic approach - we need strategies for being inclusive, for nurturing belonging, for creating psychological safety. The strategic vision needs to include an awareness of the Equality Act (2010) which raises consciousness, develops confidence and builds competence across all of the stakeholders to lean into courageous conversations about identity and representation. All staff need to be aware of all of the protected characteristics and to be empathetic to the diverse lived experiences of different individuals. A DEI commitment starts with meaningful and authentic conversations about who we are, our values and our place in the community. The foundation for this work lies in the PSHE curriculum.

Identifying and removing the potential barriers to this work:

Delivering high quality PSHE is essential to developing students in a holistic way in this ever-changing world to shape them into productive and moral citizens. However, when committing to this there are

many barriers that leaders and teachers of PSHE can face. Fear being the first and foremost: fear of content, fear of student reactions, fear of parental complaints. There are several ways these barriers can be broken down and overcome.

Our great nation is made up of a wonderfully diverse population and sometimes the different protected characteristics can come into conflict in the delivery of PSHE. It is important to remember as educators that we have a duty under the Public Sector Equality Duty (2011) to:

- (a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation;
- (b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;
- (c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it.

Engaging your parental community is key to the process both from a good practice point of view, to avoid parental complaints and since the advent of compulsory RSE in September 2021 (DfE 2021). You can do this by inviting your parents into school: through a focus group, a parental forum, open mornings – use this time to get to know your parents and break down the barriers between home and school to create an open dialogue. Consult with them on your programme of study and your policies relating to RSE and PSHE - show them some examples of lesson content and encourage their opinions - if these cannot always be supported take the time to explain why. If we start by involving them, we reduce chances of issues arising during delivery.

This can also help you overcome the challenge of time. PSHE could easily occupy a full timetable - this is where you need to consider your school and local community: What is relevant and important to

them? Which areas do you need to prioritise? There is no one size fits all when it comes to planning PSHE, it must be a flexible and evolving programme so you can adapt this and give yourself time to respond to local, national, and international issues.

A similar approach can be taken to your staff body, PSHE is ideally taught as a discrete lesson, but the life lessons involved also permeate the entire curriculum and school life. Many non-specialists teach PSHE, and this can be a daunting process. It is important to open the dialogue with your staff: What are their concerns and worries? Where do they foresee conflict arising? Where do they lack confidence? Discover the common themes and deliver training on this, encourage the use of question boxes and ground rules during lessons as this will enable them to establish their own climate for learning and seek support where necessary.

Addressing contemporary issues and hot topics:

Generation Z and Generation Alpha are set to be the most diverse generations yet (Fry & Parker 2018). We might also say they are the most globally connected generations, consuming fast news before the school day begins. Therefore, navigating discussions about contemporary issues and global awareness is becoming a fundamental teaching skill for the profession.

Research suggests that a child's moral cognition, empathy and understanding of justice are influenced by their parents and care environment too (Cowell & Decety, 2015). Social media has become a very influential source of education on contemporary topics for students; however its binary and unregulated form can be problematic for schools. It has also been liberating, enabling peaceful, online protest, awareness and understanding for so many - it is social media awareness that has led to so many watershed moments including the murders of George Floyd, Sarah Everard, the occupation of Palestine and the war in Ukraine. PSHE lessons can help students navigate these topics so that they feel confident

and able to manage sensitive issues - and the good news is you don't need to be a specialist to broadly address these topics in the classroom.

- Acknowledge their emotions. Often, responding to 'hot topics' needs to be proactive and in the moment, therefore can lead to heated feelings. Acknowledge these feelings from the outset, but explain to students that your discussions are not personal and will help everyone navigate a critical understanding of the event or issue.
- Start with the facts: a range of credible news sources can help provide a skeleton for your discussion. Provide students with a range of factual evidence about hate crime and assault so that they can evaluate the social, moral and economic impact of these issues. When discussing sensitive and triggering topics, factual evidence followed by intersectional lived experiences can help navigate emotive responses. Remind students we all have the equal right to live in a fair, safe and just society and we must work together to overcome any obstacles that prevent this.
- Take a solutions-based approach. Consider the impact of contemporary issues on different groups in society: is it possible to create a truly equitable world? What problems do we address first? What skills are needed in the 21st to solve the global mental health crises, climate change, for example?
- Explore the pros and cons of social media. Encourage students to critically consider the role of influencers and unregulated information on social media platforms. To do this, it is important for students to think empathetically: how might their trust and belief in a particular influencer or online news source impact those with and without protected characteristics in their class? What is the impact (and value) of a 30 second TikTok story about transgender rights, compared to reading and exploring a research paper about LGBT+ experiences?

Most importantly, give students a medium to express their thoughts and views in a way that feels safe for them. This might be art, blogging, podcasting or something else. Enabling individual expression when teaching sensitive topics can help students explore their own intersectionality and therefore strengthen their knowledge and understanding about the range of topics too. The key is to encourage empathy and diverse thinking, two key leadership skills students will thank you for in the future!

Creating safety for staff and students:

Creating safe spaces within the curriculum does not refer to the physical safety of learners, instead describes creating a space free from psychological or emotional harm (Holly, L. & Steiner, S., 2005). “A safe classroom space is one in which students are able to openly express their individuality, even if it differs dramatically from the norms.” (Holly, L. & Steiner, S., 2005). As educators, we must not confuse being safe with being comfortable, providing a structured space for children to confront issues that make them uncomfortable and “force them to struggle with who they are and what they believe” (Holly, L. & Steiner, S., 2005).

As teachers of PSHE, we create safe spaces to empower learners to share their voices and listen to their peers. The benefits of having their voices heard should not be outweighed by the negatives, such as feeling ashamed or ostracised. With students perceiving that they learn more in a safe space (Holly, L. & Steiner, S., 2005), how can we create safe spaces in our schools?

1. Establish ground rules: Ground rules, aligned to the school values and Diversity, Equality and Inclusion policy, support inclusive and respectful discussions where many children learn turn-taking, respect the views and privacy of others, become aware of body language and how to assert themselves respectfully in discussions. Ground rules also reference the school’s safeguarding policy in relation to disclosures that may occur in the lesson.

2. Create a non-judgemental approach: Great PSHE lessons stimulate thought and discussion. In a safe space, “safe” does not mean avoiding conflict. Children should be supported to scrutinise and struggle with their values and explore their ideologies without recrimination for expressing different opinions from their peers. “A classroom in which safe means no conflict, and that no one is ever feeling challenged is likely to be a classroom in which little learning and growth are occurring.” (Holly, L. & Steiner, S., 2005). Teachers must be mindful that one person’s sharing does not have the potential to harm others. The anonymous PSHE question box can support in exploring sensitive questions, enabling children to ask questions and provide teachers with time to research or prepare responses.

3. Know your pupils’ names: This is the first step to knowing and acknowledging your pupils as individuals (O’Brien et al., 2014). Taking the time to learn and correctly pronounce a child’s name does not only make them feel valued, but also provides an opportunity to model inclusive behaviour and create a positive classroom climate.

4. Use micro-affirmations: Mary Rowe, 2008, identifies apparently tiny acts which can have a huge impact in helping others be successful, “opening doors to opportunity, gestures of inclusion and caring, and graceful acts of listening.” Weaving opportunities to scaffold micro-affirmations for children defines your safe space: model active listening with older children; demonstrate the impact of body language on the listener; staff and older children can use scripted prompts to support responses that validate feelings, emotions and opinions.

5. Use storytelling as a medium to create a common understanding between children. Stories can reinforce the concept of the safe space and normalise children’s feelings by allowing them to share experiences. Within PSHE lessons, using ‘no real names’ the third person or an alias creates a space between the child and an experience.

Teaching about consent:

Set against the murky backdrop of #metoo and allegations of abuse and misconduct, consent remains a contentious and difficult area for educators to negotiate. In theory, it should be clear-cut. We have been told for years that 'no means no.' But what happens when it was a 'yes', but it becomes a 'no' halfway through? Or the 'no' is not communicated verbally? Or the person is saying 'yes', but you are not sure? Or the person saying 'no' is the same gender? Or you are both saying 'yes', but you are also both under the age of consent?

These are just a small selection of questions we can be asked during RSE lessons. When we first teach consent, we can be massively unprepared. Not necessarily for the questions themselves, but for the fact that the thirty 15 year olds in front of us knew so little about something so big. The 'Ask me anything (within reason)' box becomes full by the end of sessions, and without fail well over half of those slips of paper bore questions relating to some aspect of consent.

Over time, those questions helped inform the planning of RSE sessions to address those concerns. But structuring any session needs to be guided by two vital aspects - the law relating to consent (the Sexual Offences Act 2003) and the school's own safeguarding and equality policies. Additionally, the needs of the learner (such as SEND and EAL), as well as cultural and religious differences, will need to be taken into consideration when making RSE lessons on consent accessible.

According to government legislation, consent can be broadly defined as mutual agreement between partners for sexual activity and both parties having the freedom and capacity to be able to do so. The problem facing both students and educators is what this 'looks' like and this is an ideal jumping-off point to engage students in discussion.

Sexual violence is a logical follow-on from consent. Most schools will now have a defined list of Harmful Sexual Behaviours (HSBs) which all staff should be aware of, in particular in the wake of Everyone's Invited. Students will also need to be made explicitly aware of what is and what is not acceptable. These unacceptable sexualised behaviours are not necessarily 'common sense' or universally accepted or understood, especially by young people who may not have been aware that these actions fall into the bracket of HSBs (for example, catcalling), so awareness is key.

Alongside awareness is empowerment. Students need to be encouraged to examine what their own boundaries look like, what they are and are not comfortable with and how they can communicate their lines in the sand in a way they are happy with. This can be challenging for a young person at any age, but if we have learned anything in recent times, it is that every individual has a right to decide at exactly what point that 'no means no' becomes 'yes means yes' and vice versa.

Ensuring representation in PSHE and RSHE:

Representation is incredibly important for all of us. Seeing ourselves reflected in the media, in literature and in all avenues of life makes us feel seen and valued. This is even more important for the young people we teach: "Positive media representation can be helpful in increasing self-esteem for people of marginalised groups (especially youth)" (Psychology Today). This is surely one of our main aims of PSHE to develop the resilience and ensure the good mental health of the young people we teach. We have such a unique opportunity in PSHE for young people to see all their aspects of diversity reflected during these lessons, arguably more so than in any other area of the curriculum.

One of the best tools in our PSHE planning toolkit is the use of case studies and scenarios to explain ideas, issues and solutions. This helps keep discussions on a third-person basis as a distancing technique and to allow young people to take an objective view. It is also a great opportunity to allow for representation; depending on the nature of the topic you can use gender neutral names, include visible

role models and challenge the dominant narrative around relationships and families. This allows the young people we teach to have role models to aspire to both in their personal and professional lives – this can be done in all topics ranging from careers to RSE. ‘It provides hope and something to aspire to... You can’t be what you can’t see... It helps to dismantle stereotypes and helps them to see the beauty of diversity for themselves’ (Foundation Stage Forum). It is important to not underestimate the engagement from students that representation will provide. “Research has shown that ‘humans need belonging’. Being in a social group and having good relationships within that group makes them feel highly motivated” (Twinkl). Having a sense of belonging motivates young people of any age to go on to do great things both within and beyond school life, whereas a lack of representation can detrimentally affect outcomes. Research by the University of Leicester outlines that the “Lack of diverse curriculum ‘hampers’ BAME students” (BBC News). Unfortunately the majority of mainstream media still fails to represent the makeup of our diverse population with many aspects of diversity often reduced to stereotypes or token figures. We can counteract this in PSHE by using social stories, case studies and pictures to ‘usualise’ difference and encompass the many varied protected characteristics. “When we usualise something, we acclimatise people to its presence, and take away the threat of difference which creates fear and discrimination” (The Classroom.Org). Thus also helping us to combat any potentially conflicting views around discrimination that may otherwise occur. If young people are seeing diversity represented from a young age they have a greater understanding of the value of themselves and of each other as they grow and develop.

Nurturing global citizenship through ‘British values’:

‘British values’ of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs are split into several objectives in non-statutory guidance to promote spiritual, moral, social and cultural (SMSC) development in maintained schools (Gov.UK, 2014).

However 'British values' are not exclusively British. They are values of human rights shared across the globe (e.g. the United Nations Universal Declaration of Human Rights). Additionally, we are all global citizens. Our world has shrunk due to the spread and influence of popular culture and branding; we are more connected whether physically through extensive transportation networks or digitally through the internet. The COVID-19 pandemic perfectly demonstrated the former through its means of spreading across the globe, and the latter as we shifted towards remote schooling, working and socialising.

The killing of George Floyd in 2020 caused a global resurgence of empowerment. In the UK, it enabled focus on DEI and decolonising curricula to become more prominent, organised and influential. Teaching and learning materials increasingly contain perspectives outside normative spheres, and those which do not, or misrepresent groups and places, are called out. This aligns with the 'British values' of *mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs*. How a teacher obtains diverse voices and perspectives should be the real challenge, not whether they should obtain them.

While our young people are the most globally-minded generation, there is a notable political trend towards nationalism and isolationism. Influential figures and elements of the popular press have pushed back against progress towards DEI, often using terms such as 'woke' in a derogatory fashion. Some politicians have warned against teaching students about issues such as privilege and colonialism, and fly a false flag under the guise of championing freedom of expression in Higher Education. These attitudes are contradictory to 'British values'. How can we empower our young people to embrace the fundamental principles of 'British values' through PSHE in the face of this hostility?

Whether it be on social media or in the popular press, you can find examples of how being progressive based on principles aligned with 'British values' are attacked. For example, in December 2017 a Conservative minister claimed via Twitter that "Left wing snowflakes are killing comedy, tearing down historic statues, removing books from universities, dumbing down panto, removing Christ from Christmas and suppressing free speech" [verbatim]. PSHE topics such as free speech, historical events,

religious holidays etc. can utilise such claims as a stimulus for discussion and critical thinking, e.g. is there evidence that comedy is 'dying'? How do we differentiate between comedy and hate speech? Once explored, students can be in a position to decide whether this is 'woke-ness gone mad' or actual applications of 'British values'.

Apathy and inertia are fueled by hopelessness and negativity. For example, the evidence is clear that climate change is a societal and mental-health crisis not just an environmental one. Turning climate anxiety into agency through positive stories that young people can identify with is hugely empowering. The youth voice was clearly heard at last year's COP26 climate negotiations and led to the DfE publishing a strategy for climate change and sustainability education. While the likes of Greta Thunberg may be an obvious example, inspirational stories should come from a range of backgrounds. Take for instance Neha from Nepal, who raises awareness about online sexual exploitation and harassment of girls ('British value': distinguish right from wrong and to respect the civil and criminal law); or Santiago Sorrenti, a genderqueer individual who set-up a London-based 'clothes swap' to be a safe space for trans and gender-nonconforming people to find gender-affirming clothes ('contribute positively to the lives of those living and working in the locality') and Dujuan Hoosan who was the youngest person to address the UN Human Rights Council about culturally-safe education and support for Aboriginal children (appreciation of and respect for their own and other cultures). 'British values' are completely compatible with a DEI approach to teaching PSHE and to help embrace global citizenship.

Working with our stakeholders:

When the DfE reviewed PSHE in 2015, it was recommended that PSHE was best implemented through teamwork between all the agencies that are stakeholders in the young people it is delivered to. This includes parents, governors and members of the wider community even specialists depending on your educational setting.

One of the key parts of working within these teams is to support these groups to understand that PSHE empowers children to have the skills to manoeuvre effectively through life, relationships and their own mental health and emotions.

One method to raise the profile of the PSHE curriculum is sharing research for PSHE and RSE so that parents and governors begin to understand the importance of this subject. By communicating the impact on attainment that PSHE can have, parents are informed about the topic and this builds their confidence in the school and in their own role to discuss topics that support their children. Many studies show that curriculums which focus on emotional and behavioural regulation and pupil wellbeing have a positive correlation with the educational outcomes and engagement of students.

Through sharing research governors see the links between PSHE and educational outcomes which links school improvement to wider strategic plans. This will often influence Governors effectively as many of these stakeholders are also part of the parent population. However, specialist training for the governing body around the safeguarding implications of a successful PSHE curriculum are also key starting points.

The government's recommendation is that RSE and PSHE education are developed in consultation with the key stakeholders. This should include opportunities for both parents and governors to read and openly comment on their support or concerns for the curriculum content. It is well documented in the media that the implementation of the new statutory curriculum caused concerns. Protests took place around the country because PSHE, which included relationships education of alternative family groups and LGBTQ relationships, was incorrectly assumed to be a method of brainwashing students with the 'gay agenda'. These miscommunications show how open lines of communication between key stakeholders ensure all groups understand the importance of PSHE being a two way communication.

Using parent governors to support during this consultation is good as there is a person who sits on both sides of the fence. Parents may feel more open to giving their open feedback with someone who

has a similar vested interest and creates a collaborative environment where parents understand the school is not dictating to them what should be taught to their children. Parental engagement is only successful if you are prepared at school for the differences of opinion people may have during the development of the curriculum. As previously mentioned, the new statutory PSHE curriculum ensures that all protected characteristics in the equality act are recognised and this has caused well documented tensions between interested parties throughout the country. This should be planned for before the curriculum is launched so that parents are supported and do not feel oppositional from the start.

PSHE is a very personal subject to teach and for pupils to be involved in. The topics we discuss are also difficult conversations for parents with their own children. It is important to recognise this and for the adults involved to trust each other and share the vision. As teachers, we can not be scared to have these vulnerable conversations as they are the only way to build trust and this will support when there is pushback as parents will understand the heart of why it is important.

A key learning from this section is that successful relationship development between stakeholders should be proactive from the school to ensure everyone feels involved. The consultation process should be continuous and to pre-empt this parents should be aware when you start the consultation process of all dates and times they can be involved. This can include: continuous training with professionals through workshops for parents, annual policy review which involves all key stakeholders, creating open dialogue at all times which fosters a collaborative approach to PSHE.

Identifying training needs and gaps:

Embedding PSHE across the whole school curriculum has come to the forefront of the agenda for school leaders and has become a frequent line of inquiry for school inspections. PSHE can be more easily and explicitly linked with some subjects than others. Puberty in science, poetry in English and the history of global citizens across the humanities subjects. Arguably the most important subject linked to PSHE would be that of Information Technology and Electrical Engineering (ITEE). Post-pandemic, where our

young people have been almost forced to turn online for support they once could rely on in person, means now more than ever we need to ensure they are empowered to make informed decisions about what to access and how to filter it. In Computing at key stage 3 and 4 students must (DfE 2013):

- understand a range of ways to use technology safely, respectfully, responsibly and securely
- protect their online identity and privacy
- recognise inappropriate content, contact and conduct
- know how to report concerns

Collaborative working between ITEE and PSHE leads is vital for this to be taught effectively and ensuring these links are explicitly made ensuring staff are equipped with the skills and confidence to open and close conversations on these topics safely.

ECF (2019) provides ample opportunity for PSHE experiences from ITT to be consolidated, with several standards calling out for contribution to the wider school culture. Both in 'Professional Behaviours' (Standard 8) and 'Subject and Curriculum' (Standard 3), ECTs are expected to teach "within a coherent wider vision for successful learning" and "develop a feeling of shared responsibility for improving the lives of all pupils within the school". This is an ideal opportunity for ECTs to contribute and ECT leads should ensure this criteria is fulfilled in part through wider work in PSHE.

There are numerous routes to becoming involved in PSHE, from a PGCE in Secondary Citizenship and PSHE with Qualified Teacher Status such as at Sheffield Hallam University, to staff members trained in other subjects changing direction in their careers due to a passion for PSHE who then carry out specialist training such as 'Advanced Certificate in the Role of a RSHE/PSHE Lead' (The National College). Other specialist CPD can fall anywhere in between, with online and in person courses being readily available from a variety of reputable sources, including charities and online networks.

Delivery of PSHE in schools is varied, this could be by specialist teachers or non-specialists; Form Tutors, guest speakers, Heads of Year, School Nurses, PCSOs; the list goes on. This is positive because it

raises the profile of the subject; the more people involved, the more people are talking about PSHE. However, without a clear vision and lead, this could become fragmented and gaps could appear, with key content being missed or incorrectly taught. Ideally a member of SLT who is invested in embedding PSHE into the whole school culture will provide the strategic lead and ensure appropriate training is given to anyone who is identified as requiring it.

What is increasingly clear moving forward is that PSHE must be taught by teachers who are confident, competent and aware, in a culture and ethos that holds the space for PSHE to be taught. Alternatively, PSHE taught by someone who has not been trained properly, could at times be more damaging than not being taught at all.

It is clear that effective, diverse, equitable and inclusive PSHE education is everyone's responsibility within a school community and must be a golden thread running through the vision and mission of every school. It is this collective consciousness in the school community, from students, staff, parents and carers, governors and all stakeholders that will ensure our young people leave school equipped to stay healthy, safe and prepared for life and work within modern Britain and beyond.

Conclusion:

When considering diversity in the PSHE curriculum the PSHE lead and teaching team need to invest time in doing the inner work before starting the outerwork - we need to understand ourselves, our own belief systems and how our world view has been shaped. In turn we need to create the space for our learners to do the same.

Some key things to consider for all teachers of PSHE who are committed to ensuring that DEI is a golden thread in their curriculum:

- Who is teaching PSHE and how diverse is their individual and collective identity?

- How do we identify and close the gaps in our own lived experiences to navigate any unconscious biases that we hold?
- What are the visible identities of the learners and their community, and how do we ensure they are represented?
- What of the less visible/ hidden protected characteristics do we need to be aware of and ensure that we create space to explore?
- How do we create a space to unpack the potential conflict between some of the protected characteristics?

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Recommended Resources:

Decolonising Geography: www.decolonisethegeography.com

Diverse Educators: www.diverseeducators.co.uk

End Sexism: www.endsexismschools.org.uk

Gal-Dem: <https://gal-dem.com/>

Generation Feminist: www.genfem.co.uk

Global Equality Collective: www.thegec.org

MA Consultancy: www.ma-consultancy.co.uk

School Should Be: www.schoolshouldbe.com

Split Banana: www.splitbanana.co.uk

The Conversationalist: <https://www.theconversationalist.com/>

You Beyond You: www.youbeyou.co.uk

Zenarations: <https://zenerations.wordpress.com/>