



## NORTH LANARKSHIRE COUNCIL: DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

### Sex Education in Scottish Schools

#### Report by Director

#### 1.0 Purpose

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide information on a range of recently published Scottish Executive documents on Sex Education and to obtain members approval for the Director of Education's position in response to the documents.

#### 2.0 Background

- 2.1 Sex Education in Scottish schools has always been a sensitive topic that has been dealt with in a variety of ways and with varying degrees of success. The repeal of Section 2a of the 1986 Local Government Act brought to the public attention certain inadequacies in terms of the delivery of sex education in schools.
- 2.2 The Scottish Executive, aware of the need for better advice on the topic, produced two consultative documents towards the end of the year 2000 in partnership with Learning and Teaching Scotland. These were *Guidance for Schools and Local Authorities on Effective Consultation with Parents and Carers* and a *Guide for Parents and Carers*.
- 2.3 A short but extensive consultation followed. The Education Department, through a small working group, provided a supportive response. Following the consultation period three final documents have been issued to local authorities and schools. These are entitled:
- e *Sex Education in Scottish Schools, Summary of National Advice*
  - e *Sex Education in Scottish Schools, Effective Consultation with Parents and Carers*
  - e *Sex Education in Scottish Schools, A Guide for Parents and Carers.*

Copies of the documents have been placed in the Members' Library.

#### 3. The New Documents

- 3.1 The new documents contain most of the content presented at the consultation phase and are intended for use in conjunction with other current publications including the circular, Standards in Scotland's Schools, etc. Act 2000: Conduct of Sex Education in Scottish Schools and the Summary of National Advice on Sex Education.
- 3.2 The *Summary of National Advice* follows the report of the Working Group on Sex Education in Scottish Schools (June 2000) and is intended for use with the other two documents. It presents the statutory position and curricular place of Sex Education within the national context. It provides extensive sources of national advice and includes guidance produced by the Catholic Education Commission. Also included are details of resources for use by teachers and pupils as

well as those under development. The final section presents an outline of different faith perspectives on education about sexuality.

- 3.3 The document covering *Effective Consultation with Parents and Carers* provides guidance for schools and local authorities within the context of three key sections:
- Section 1: Principles and Aims of Sex Education
  - Section 2: The Legal Framework
  - Section 3: Organisation and Management.
- 3.4 The preface of *Effective Consultation with Parents and Carers* states that sex education should be presented in a context that values stable relationships, healthy living and personal responsibility and firmly sets sex education within the wider context of health education, religious and moral education and personal and social development.
- 3.5 It also states that the Executive seeks to ensure that national advice and curricular guidance is suitable for all authorities and schools in Scotland. It is recognised that religious authorities with a role in denominational education do provide guidance for their denominational schools, and that right will continue as at present.
- 3.6 The document proceeds to indicate the requirement for schools to consult parents in advance of sex education programmes and provides pointers to developing relationships in undertaking this responsibility. Additional elements in the consultation process include the creation of strategies for consulting with young people.
- 3.7 Separate guidance on working with external agencies within the school and issues of confidentiality for all professionals involved is currently being prepared. Reference is made in the document to those groups that require particular consideration, for example, children considered vulnerable or at risk, those with special educational needs and young people looked after by local authorities. Local authorities are also advised of the importance of multiple agency involvement in any policy on consultation.
- 3.8 The document also provides precise advice for parents and carers who wish to withdraw their child from the sex education programme, including the need to take account of the child's view, the possible effects on the child and arrangements which the school would be required to make.
- 3.9 The role of the local authority is clearly explained and good practice in policy terms outlined. Similar advice is provided in regard to the schools' role in effective consultation policy and includes detail of the expectations of the school health education co-ordinator in the process.
- 3.10 The *Guide for Parents and Carers* is provided in a leaflet form and should prove to be particularly helpful in answering the type of questions that parents and carers regularly raise with the Education Department and individual schools. It outlines:
- what sex education will cover
  - the home-school partnership and shared responsibilities on which effective sex education is based
  - the rights of parents/carers to be consulted, in advance, on sex education programmes
  - children's right to have their views taken into account.

- 3.11 The leaflet also considers, in an informative and focussed way, five important and common questions:
- What are schools expected to do?
  - What is sex education?
  - What will my child be taught?
  - How will I be consulted?
  - What can I do if I have concerns?
- 3.12 The national advice indicates an anticipation that schools, after due reflection and/or consultation as to the most appropriate timing and target audience, will wish to issue copies of the *Guide for Parents and Carers*.
- ## 4.0 Support for Schools
- 4.1 The Education Department already works closely with Lanarkshire Health Board and Lanarkshire Health Promotion Department as part of a partnership approach to supporting schools. In-service training sessions for schools' health education co-ordinators have been arranged for the next school session through the Quality Development Service, in conjunction with Positive Steps, a Scottish Executive approved agency specialising in matters of sexual awareness.
- 4.2 The Scottish Executive has sought to ensure that the national guidance is suitable for all authorities and schools in Scotland. It has recognised, however, that religious authorities with a role in denominational education already provide guidance for denominational schools in the area of religious, moral and sex education and that right will continue as at present. The education department will maintain its commitment to support the needs of all North Lanarkshire pupils in the area of sex education.
- ## 5. Proposals
- 5.1 The documents and advice contained therein effectively formalise much of the good practice already in existence both within the local authority and in schools but provide more secure guidelines within a national context. It is proposed that the Scottish executive guidance is endorsed as the authority's position on sex education in North Lanarkshire establishments and that this position is formally recognised through the issue of a Standard Circular to schools. In endorsing the national guidelines the circular will particularly emphasise the importance of school approaches and programmes of sex education emerging from full and regular consultation with parents and carers. All education should represent a partnership between school and home and this partnership is crucial in areas of sensitivity and importance to the personal growth of young people, such as sex education.
- 5.2 It is further proposed, in view of the concerns that have been publicly articulated about the nature and quality of some of the sex education materials available for use within school sex education programmes, that the department establish a short-life working group comprising representatives of promoted staff, classroom teachers and parents to review and offer advice to establishments on appropriate material for inclusion in sex education programmes.

**6. Recommendations**

6.1 The education committee is asked to:

- (i) note and approve the contents of the report and
- (ii) approve the proposals contained in paragraphs 5.1 and 5.2 as the basis of the education department's policy on sex education

*Michael O'Neill*