

PSHE education is central to helping pupils to stay healthy and safe and to equipping them with the personal and social skills to negotiate life's challenges, opportunities and risks. There is also growing evidence to suggest that the skills and attributes acquired through PSHE education have a significant impact on pupils' academic achievement, employability and future life chances. This document summarises some of the evidence to help you make a compelling argument to colleagues, senior leaders, parents, governors and others about the crucial importance of PSHE education.

The links between health education, health and academic success

Health education, delivered as part of a whole-school approach, has been proven to have a significant impact on health behaviours by a recent review of Health Promoting Schools (Langford et al, 2014). There is also evidence that these improvements in health are linked to academic success:

- A recent British Medical Journal editorial (Bonell et al, 2014) notes that "education and health are synergistic... students in better health do better academically," before going on to identify countries such as Finland, Singapore and Sweden which have better academic success than England and a greater emphasis on pupil health.
- This 'synergistic' relationship between health and academic performance was reinforced by the Chief Medical Officer in her most recent annual report, which refers to PSHE education as a 'bridge between education and public health' (Chief Medical Officer, 2012).

How social and emotional learning and soft skills aid attainment

There is also growing evidence of the links between good health, social and emotional learning, soft skill development and academic success:

- A DfE commissioned report (Gutman and Vorhaus, 2012) found that pupils with higher levels of emotional wellbeing go on to have higher levels of academic success.
- A study of emotional resilience programmes in 22 UK schools (Challen et al, 2011) found short-term improvement in pupil attendance and attainment rates, particularly amongst those eligible for free school meals and pupils who had been performing at below national average in maths and English.
- A study by US economist James Heckman looking at the impacts of life-long learning in a range of educational settings highlighted the relationship between socio-emotional skills, physical development, mental health and attainment (Heckman, 2008).

Life skills and life chances

A series of reports in recent years also emphasise the importance to pupils' life chances of the skills and attributes PSHE education seeks to develop:

- The Demos 'Forgotten Half' report noted that skills such as communication, teamwork and application are as important as academic ability in predicting future earnings (Demos, 2011).
- The 'First Steps' report from the Confederation of British Industry (CBI, 2013) called for a more "rounded and grounded" education system, concluding that "personal behaviours and attributes – sometimes termed 'character' – play a critical role in personal effectiveness".
- The 2013 CBI/Pearson Education and Skills Survey identified 'communication skills' and 'self-management' as among employers' top priorities from schools (CBI/Pearson, 2013).
- The 2014 British Chambers of Commerce Skills and Employment Manifesto calls for intensified efforts from schools to help pupils to develop 'soft employability skills' (BCC, 2014).

Life skills and life chances (cont'd)

There is strong evidence that these skills can be developed through classroom learning:

- An analysis of over 200 Social and Emotional Learning programmes by Durlak et al (2011) demonstrated improved social and emotional skills, attitudes, behaviour and an 11% improvement in academic achievement.
- The Education Endowment Foundation's Teaching and Learning Toolkit, which provides up-to-date summaries of the impact of different educational interventions, states that Social and Emotional Learning programmes have a significant impact on attitudes to learning, social relationships in school and attainment itself (EEF, 2014).

Parents want it, pupils want it and it's good for the whole school

Both children and parents want this focus in the education system to complement and support academic learning and it contributes to whole school success:

- A YouGov survey commissioned by the PSHE Association in May 2014 shows that 90% of parents agree that children and young people should receive lessons that prepare them for life and work, and support their health and emotional wellbeing alongside academic study (YouGov/PSHE Association, 2014).
- 470,000 young people were involved in making a curriculum for life the UKYP's priority campaign in England in 2014 (UKYP, 2014). The campaign calls for better PSHE education in schools, recognising its importance to preparing young people for life.
- Ofsted has identified a strong correlation between schools which achieved a high grade for PSHE education and those which were graded outstanding for overall effectiveness (Ofsted, 2013).

Conclusion

There is strong evidence that the skills and attributes pupils develop through PSHE education have the potential to be of great benefit in many areas of their lives, including academic performance and future employability. It is also clear that pupils and parents want this opportunity for learning on the timetable. In short, PSHE education is a subject with significant support and potential.

The majority of Heads want to support their pupils' broader development (EdComs, 2011) but face accountability measures focussed mainly on academic achievement. We believe evidence collated here is therefore critically important for those making the case for PSHE education, as it proves its role in supporting these areas while being of great benefit in its own right.

If schools make time for the subject and deliver it in line with best practice principles, then it has the potential to have a significant impact on health, academic achievement and future life chances.

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