

# Consultation on Draft "Sex and Relationships Guidance for Schools" (produced by the National Assembly for Wales)

## A response from The Christian Institute

### 1) The importance of marriage is undermined

The Learning and Skills Act 2000 requires schools to teach the nature of marriage and its importance to family life. The front page of the draft guidance acknowledges this. Yet marriage is only discussed twice in the whole document.

Even when it is mentioned, its importance is downplayed. Page 3 of the introduction says:

“As part of sex and relationship education, pupils must be taught about the nature and significance of marriage, and the importance of a stable family life for bringing up children. The National Assembly also recognises that there are strong and mutually supportive relationships outside of marriage. We live in a diverse society and pupils will come from a variety of family backgrounds. Teachers should take care to approach all children with sensitivity and respect and ensure that there is no stigmatisation of children based on their home circumstances.” (emphasis added)

### Key Points

- ◆ The guidance should be more positive about marriage, emphasising the benefits for adults as well as children. Marriage is the surest foundation for raising children, as the Government has said. Teenage pregnancy rates are lowest amongst children in married families.
- ◆ The wording of the guidance encourages schools to teach that cohabitation is as stable as marriage. In fact, cohabitations are four times more likely to break up than marriages and less than 4% of cohabitations last ten years or more.
- ◆ Reducing teenage pregnancy is one of the major reasons for the new guidance. Shouldn't the guidance encourage children not to have under-age sex? Why not encourage them to save sex for marriage? This is being done successfully in the US education system.

### 2) It implies that religious and ethnic minority parents are not capable of giving sex education like other parents are

Under the heading “Children of different cultural backgrounds and Religious affiliations” the draft says:

“**1.27** Research with families shows that children cannot always rely on their parents to talk to them about puberty or sex. In particular a range of children from minority communities are less likely to talk to their parents about sex and relationships. Young women and young men from some

minority communities may rely on schools as their main, and sometimes only, source of sex education.

**1.28** It is therefore important for policies to be culturally and religiously *sensitive*, and inclusive of all children. Primary and secondary schools should consult parents and pupils both on what is included, and on how it is delivered. For example, for some children it is not culturally appropriate to address particular issues in a mixed group. Consulting pupils and their families will help to establish what is appropriate and acceptable for them. Generally, parents appreciate support from the school, if they are consulted and involved.”

### Key Points

Paragraph 1.27 implies that religious and ethnic minority parents are more likely to fail their children when it comes to talking about sex.

- ◆ This is a stereotype. The fact is, the daughters of religious parents can be at *least* risk of becoming pregnant whilst a teenager. Some ethnic minorities have higher teenage pregnancy rates but very many of these are within marriage.
- ◆ Many parents, especially those with religious convictions, reject a highly explicit approach to sex education. They believe it can promote sexual experimentation. They want to preserve their children’s innocence for as long as they can. They may do this by delaying discussing sex until the child is older, or by discussing such matters in an understated way to avoid stirring up curiosity. They should not be criticised for this approach.
- ◆ Religious parents are often *more* involved in their children’s education. Their faith encourages them to be more concerned about how they bring up their children. The guidance does not mention this.

### **3) Homosexuality is to be taught as a non-controversial issue**

The draft includes a long subsection entitled “Sexual identity and sexual orientation” which includes the following paragraph:

**1.33** It is up to schools to make sure that the needs of all pupils are met in their programmes. Young people, whatever their developing sexuality, need to feel that it is relevant to them and sensitive to their needs. They might also find it difficult to talk to their parents or carers about matters of sexuality and sexual orientation. The National Assembly is clear that teachers should be able to deal honestly and sensitively with these issues, answer appropriate questions, provide factual information, and offer support. While there should not be any direct promotion of sexual orientation, this should not preclude teachers from discussing such issues in a sensitive, open and non-discriminatory way. It is important that young people develop an understanding and respect for others, regardless of orientation. They should be encouraged to respect and value diversity and differences in human life.

(emphasis added)

It does acknowledge that “sexual orientation and what is taught in schools is an area for concern for some parents” (paragraph 1.34) but it does not suggest that

this concern be respected in how the subject is taught. The goal of the school is to win the parent over rather than to change what is taught:

“Schools that liaise closely with parents when developing their sex and relationship education policy and programme should be able to reassure parents of the content of the programme and the context in which it will be presented.”

### Key Points

Paragraph 1.33 confuses respect for people with respect for homosexual practice. You can respect a person without agreeing with what they do.

- ◆ The largest study of sexual attitudes found that 79% of men in Wales think that homosexual practice between men is always or mostly always wrong.
- ◆ Schools should not undermine the values of the majority of parents by teaching that homosexual practice is a morally acceptable option for pupils.
- ◆ When it comes to what is taught from the front of the class, parents and pupils expect homosexuality to be presented as a controversial moral issue. This does not preclude a sensitive response in private to an individual pupil who thinks he might be homosexual.

#### **4) Pressure is put on primary schools to introduce sex education even though it is not required by law.**

Page 7 sets out the Assembly’s view on sex education in the primary school:

“In the case of primary schools, while it is open to them to have a policy in this area, they are not compelled to have a sex education programme. That said, the Assembly would hope that they would nevertheless see the value in having such a programme.”

In the main section on primary schools it states:

**“1.12 The Assembly recommends that all primary schools have a sex and relationship education programme tailored to the age and the physical and emotional maturity of the children as outlined in the Personal and Social Education Framework.”** (emphasis added)

The guidance goes on to suggest the teaching of conception, pregnancy and birth in *primary schools* through the non-statutory Personal and Social Education framework. Yet these topics are currently on the *secondary* school syllabus for science.

### Key Points

Much of the guidance seeks to encourage primary schools to adopt a full-blown sex education programme. (See paragraph 1.12 above)

- ◆ Primary schools should not be pressurised into introducing sex education. The National Curriculum and the law do not require it.
- ◆ Under the National Curriculum primary schools already cover the human life cycle. There might be a case for covering puberty in a sensitive way. But now

the Assembly wants existing secondary school topics (such as conception, pregnancy and birth) covered in the primary school. This is too much too soon.

**You can view the Draft “Sex and relationships Guidance for Schools” online at <http://www.wales.gov.uk/subieducationtraining/content/curri/relationships-ents-e.htm>.**