



9<sup>th</sup> October 2022

Dear Principal, Teachers and Board of Management,

The Irish Education Alliance (IEA) is a growing organisation comprised of primary, secondary, third level and early years teachers and educators across Ireland. As professionals who work with children and adolescents, the health and wellbeing of our students is of paramount importance.

We are writing to you today in relation to the proposed changes to the Junior Cycle SPHE/RSE curriculum. As you may be aware the NCCA have invited submissions from teachers, parents and other interested parties. The deadline for submissions is **Tuesday 18<sup>th</sup> October**.

We have some serious concerns in relation to the proposed changes to the curriculum and we would ask you to give this your full attention and to consider submitting a response to the NCCA. The draft curriculum and the consultation process can be accessed on the NCCA website here:

<https://ncca.ie/en/junior-cycle/curriculum-developments/social-personal-and-health-education-relationships-and-sexuality-education/>

Concerns that teachers in our organisation have include the following:

### **The Promotion of Transgender Ideology and Gender Identity**

Gender Identity is defined in the draft curriculum as *'a person's felt internal and individual experience of gender, for example, cisgender, transgender, non-binary, which may or may not correspond with the sex assigned to them at birth'* (Glossary section – Appendix 2).

Gender identity is an ideology not a biological fact. We are all born biologically male or female. It is an opinion or a belief that our gender identity is separate to our biological sex. While this belief may be important to some people, it is not appropriate to teach it to young teenagers as a fact, yet the Draft Curriculum at 1.4 states that *'sexual orientation, gender identity and gender expression are core parts of human identity'*. The ideology of 'gender identity' and the

confusing terminology associated with it, is therefore being misrepresented to school children as fact.

The promotion of gender identity poses significant risks to the welfare of children, who are being taught through this ideology that although biologically a male or female, they can choose to be different sex or must decide what gender to identify as. Teenagers often suffer from anxiety, lack of self-esteem and may have difficulty accepting their changing bodies during puberty. Adding extra confusion over their gender identity, is likely only to compound anxiety and confusion and in some cases cause serious psychological damage. At a very vulnerable and insecure age of adolescence, when minors are not fully psychologically and mentally developed, life changing decisions are being taken as a direct result of the promotion of gender identity. At this early stage in the promotion of this ideology within school systems in other jurisdictions, we are already seeing evidence of many individuals suffering severe trauma as a result of making decisions to change their sex at an earlier age. Children who would not be considered old enough to get a tattoo are being allowed to fundamentally change their bodies through taking hormones and undergoing surgery. The recent controversy over the Tavistock Clinic in the UK is just one example.

While we recognise the importance of diversity, inclusion and respect for individual choices, it is not appropriate for an ideology such as gender identity to be taught to teenagers as fact, at the risk of causing them harm.

### **Over emphasis on sexual activity**

The glossary definition of sexual activity/sexual intimacy in the curriculum document states – *‘Sexual activity/sexual intimacy: a range of activities from kissing, touching, fondling to sexual intercourse (in all its forms) which involve giving and receiving sexual pleasure. These activities can be solitary or involve other people.’* This is promoting the pursuit of sexual pleasure for its own sake without a focus on the relationships involved – the pre-occupation with sex is the wrong emphasis to be giving school children. **The Curriculum should reduce the excessive focus on sexual activity** and emphasize instead the importance and quality of relationships in the RSE programme.

### **Exposing Students to Pornography**

Strand 3, point 3.9 states that *“investigate the influence of digital media (in particular, the influence of pornography) on young people’s understanding, expectations and social norms in relation to sexual expression”*.

Due to the over sexualisation of mass media content, pornography has been promoted and normalised, and so too has sexual abuse. Ireland has recorded a huge increase in the sexual abuse of children. The NUIG Active Consent team, **who believe in using pornography with school children** as part of sexual consent workshops, have been co-opted by the NCCA and the Department of Education to devise and deliver Consent education as part of the new RSE

Curriculum. It is incomprehensible that any educational facility would consider showing children aged 12 to 15 pornographic material, which will lead to the further sexualisation of children.

Under the Children First Act 2015, emotional abuse includes exposing a child to sexually inappropriate material. The introduction of pornographic material into the Draft Curriculum is, therefore, not in a child's best interests, nor does it safeguard or promote their welfare, but indeed exposes them to risk of psychological and emotional harm and it would be in direct contravention of the Children First Act.

In conclusion, several aspects of the draft SPHE/RSE curriculum, as outlined above, are entirely inappropriate for children aged 12 to 15. Under the Children First Act 2015 the interests of the child must always be paramount. We are calling on teachers, principals and boards of management, as the gatekeepers of their schools, to act now to protect the welfare of the vulnerable young people in their care as they are duty bound to do under the Children First Act.

Yours Sincerely

The Irish Education Alliance