

22/11/ 2022

Dear Principal, Teachers and Board of Management,

The Irish Education Alliance (IEA) is a growing organisation comprising of over 300 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 in relation to the Consultation process that is now taking place on the “**Background paper and brief for the redevelopment of Senior Cycle SPHE**”. As you may be aware the NCCA have invited submissions from teachers, parents and other interested parties. The deadline for submissions is December 6th, 2022.

We, the Irish Education Alliance, have serious concerns about the Background paper and brief and we ask you to consider these when submitting your response to the NCCA. The Background Paper and Brief can be accessed on the NCCA website here:

[Background paper and brief for the redevelopment of ... \(ncca.ie\)](https://www.ncca.ie/Background%20paper%20and%20brief%20for%20the%20redevelopment%20of%20...)

Concerns that teachers in our organisation have include the following:

Views of teachers: The views of all teachers are not reflected in the Background paper. There is not a consensus amongst teachers on the need for RSE to be holistic in its approach as stated on p. 7, also p.29 of the Background paper. “RSE needs to be...holistic in its approach’. The Holistic Sexuality Education (HSE) approach does not, however, give adequate weight to the importance of the relationship context of sexuality and instead focuses on the individual’s own pleasure from sexual behaviour. This results in a highly sexualised approach to RSE. The Irish Education Alliance believe this approach to is not appropriate for schoolchildren as the over-emphasis on sexual behaviour promotes a promiscuous attitude to sex and does not promote the welfare of the child. We believe therefore, that “The International Technical Guidance on Comprehensive Sexuality Education” (pages 22,23,24 of the Background paper) should not be used to guide the redevelopment of a curriculum for senior cycle SPHE. Teachers in Irish Education Alliance believe that SPHE should not be made mandatory at Senior Cycle.

Gender Ideology. The Technical Guidance on CSE also promotes gender ideology– ‘The social construction of gender and gender norms’ (p.23) - that gender is a social construct which can be different from the biological sex of a child. This is a belief and not a fact. Teaching gender ideology to school children is not appropriate and can lead to much confusion and anxiety about their identity. The Irish Education Alliance believe very strongly that gender ideology should not be taught as part of the Senior Cycle programme, as the latest evidence is that most children suffering from gender dysphoria are simply going through a transient phase. The following link gives latest guidance from the NHS in England that children should not be affirmed in changing their gender nor encouraged to change their names and pronouns (female to male & vice-versa).

<https://news.yahoo.com/nhs-warns-most-trans-identifying-123016885.html>

The controversy about gender dysphoria treatment in the Tavistock Institute in the UK is another indication that the promotion of gender ideology can be very damaging. Children and young people have undergone irreversible, life changing treatments to change their gender, which they have later regretted. Gender ideology has no place in an RSE programme for school students. We believe children suffering from gender confusion should be treated with the greatest understanding and compassion and be given the supports they need.

Ethos of Schools and SPHE/RSE: The Background Paper makes no reference to and takes no account of the ethos of schools, which is a serious omission. Parents are the first educators of their children and select a school on the basis of the school’s ethos. For this reason, RSE should be kept as a separate subject from SPHE. This would also allow parents to remove their children from RSE classes that are not in accordance with their values. This is the legal right of both schools and parents, which should be fully respected in the design and delivery of the RSE programme. RSE should not be merged with SPHE as part of an integrated SPHE/RSE curriculum as proposed, and the Background Paper must take account of the characteristic ethos and values of schools, including faith-based schools.

Views of Parents: The views of parents, were not reflected in the Review or in the Background Paper. It is unacceptable that parents are not involved in the development or delivery of SPHE/RSE in a collaborative manner – it is imperative that parents are integrated into the development process of the Senior Cycle SPHE/RSE programme. These are our partners in education. There is much emphasis on addressing the needs of the students (pg. 7 of background paper) “RSE ... needs to be responsive to students’ identified needs”, while this is important, parents must not be excluded from the process as they are the primary educators.

Conclusion: In conclusion we are calling on teachers, principals and boards of management, to send a submission to the NCCA showing your opposition to the many areas of the Background Paper and Brief that do not promote the wellbeing of the students, nor protect the welfare of vulnerable young people. The submission should be emailed to SPHEdevelopments@ncca.ie. It is suggested to send a copy of the submission to the Minister for Education - norma.foley@oireachtas.ie. The teacher survey can be accessed on the following link:

<https://ncca.ie/en/senior-cycle/curriculum-developments/senior-cycle-social-personal-and-health-education-sphe/>

We also ask you to send this consultation link to the parents so that they can complete the parents survey.

Yours Sincerely,

The Irish Education Alliance