

Consultation on the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill

Evidence submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee](#) for Stage 1 scrutiny of the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Bill.

About you

Organisation: Mencap Cymru

1. The Bill's general principles

1.1 Do you support the principles of the [Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Bill](#)?

Yes

1.2 Please outline your reasons for your answer to question 1.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1500 words)

Mencap Cymru fully support the principles of the Bill relating to RSE and its intention to "improve the profile, quality and consistency" of the subject in terms of both content and delivery.

We believe that the introduction of mandatory RSE is critical for the development of pupils with additional learning needs. Pupils with a learning disability are likely to ground their own self-image in their experiences of prejudice and other negative public attitudes towards them which can lower their sense of self-worth and their understanding of their own identity. This has a direct impact on their ability to form friendships and relationships, to safeguard themselves effectively and to understand their feelings and desires. We know that disabled children and adults are at greater risk of experiencing abuse and violence than their non-disabled peers (Hughes et al 2012). We also know that one factor that has been identified as increasing vulnerability to abuse is a lack of sexual knowledge and therefore ability to self-protect (Eastgate et al 2011). Mandatory RSE has an important role to play in addressing these challenges for pupils with a learning disability.

1.3 Do you think there is a need for legislation to deliver what this Bill is trying to achieve?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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2. The Bill's implementation

2.1 Do you have any comments about any potential barriers to implementing the Bill? If no, go to question 3.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

It is clear that the success of the implementation of the RSE element of the curriculum is dependent on the competence and confidence of teachers. Currently, very few teachers access or receive specialist RSE curriculum training. RSE is also not included in current Initial Teacher Education (ITE) and not a requirement for in-service teachers providing RSE. We are concerned that without a specific commitment and subsequent resources to the professional development of teachers, consistent and quality RSE will not be achieved.

It will also be necessary for the RSE code and or statutory guidance to stipulate the need for professionals to proactively engage with families/carers of pupils with a learning disability. Families often feel ill equipped to support this aspect of their child's life but what we know for pupils with a learning disability is their dependence on family to access information. Again we need to keep in mind that families are also subjected to the dominant narrative within society that denies people with a learning disability access to any sexual identity - a narrative that erodes identity self worth and capacity for belonging.

2.2 Do you think the Bill takes account of these potential barriers?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

There is insufficient detail within the bill aside from "professional learning will be required in order for teachers to gain the knowledge and confidence to embed relationships and sexuality education within their teaching".

We believe Welsh Government should provide ring-fenced funding for RSE professional learning for teachers (including bespoke ALN RSE professional learning) and external RSE service providers

3. Unintended consequences

3.1 Do you think there are there any unintended consequences arising from the Bill? If no, go to question 4.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

Without specialist training, and access to specialist services schools may either avoid covering perceived sensitive or challenging topics altogether or provide RSE in a way that fails to adequately safeguard and meet the needs of children and young people - this is a particular risk given the dominant narrative defining people with a learning disability in terms of their sexuality. Adults with a learning disability are routinely denied access to sexual expression or identity. Mencap Cymru's Heritage funded Our Social Network project has collected the oral histories of people with a learning disability and autism around their experience of friendships and relationships; these accounts expose the lack of access to RSE within schools and the on-going impact in terms of navigating friendships, relationships, sense of autonomy and identity.

4. Financial implications

4.1 Do you have any comments on the financial implications of the Bill (as set out in Part 2 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#))? If no, go to question 5.1

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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5. Powers to make subordinate legislation

5.1 Do you have any comments on the appropriateness of the powers in the Bill for Welsh Ministers to make subordinate legislation (as set out in Chapter 5 of Part 1 of the [Explanatory Memorandum](#)). If no, go to question 6.1.

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 500 words)

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6. Other considerations

6.1 Do you have any other points you wish to raise about this Bill?

(we would be grateful if you could keep your answer to around 1000 words)

The effective implementation of the RSE curriculum is fundamental to addressing Welsh Government's priorities in terms of reducing social isolation and loneliness. When it comes to interactions with others, pupils with a learning disability may be less able to deal with potential issues around conflict, rejection, disappointment which is a key skill required in developing and maintaining friendships and relationships. As a result, research shows that children with a learning disability are more likely to experience loneliness and have fewer friends, lower levels of warmth and closeness within friendships, smaller social networks and receive less social support. However, this combination is not inevitable: we know that someone's resilience can be boosted by outside factors such as having a sense of belonging and, as such, there is a clear benefit in providing children and young people with increased skills to form and maintain friendships. Often the loneliness and social isolation agenda is framed around external factors, when it is clear to us one of the key considerations is supporting children and young people with a learning disability to be better attuned and recognise their own emotions and interactions. The implementation of consistent and quality RSE is synonymous with tackling disconnection and loneliness.

