

Dear

Mr. William Powell AM (Chair)

Mr. Russell George AM

Ms. Bethan Jenkins AM

Ms. Joyce Watson AM

10/09/2015

**REF.: P-04-636 Statutory Sex and Relationships Education (SRE)**

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the Minister's correspondence dated 20/08/2015. We were very pleased with the outcome of the previous committee meeting on 16/06/2015. However, we would like to point out a few further considerations on the comments in the Minister's letter.

We appreciate the value of allowing schools the flexibility to decide how the curriculum content is delivered to suit the school's need. Indeed, this is a particularly valuable asset in the light of different cultural, religious and other circumstances which may vary in each individual school. Nevertheless, we re-assert the need to ensure the delivery of a minimum and age-appropriate content that is inclusive of LGBT topics; sexual orientation and gender identity are not variables to be allocated in the new curriculum, but subjects of over-arching relevance for all children, regardless of how they and their families identify.

It is right that head teachers and governing bodies have control over the allocation of their budget and resources; they are effectively best placed to identify the school's needs. However, we feel the benefit of an inclusive content need to be emphasised, as there is added value in a more inclusive and open school environment for both pupils and staff. The Pioneer Schools concept can be an effective way to encourage and deliver good practice but pupils and families present in the schools community (and organisations representing them) need to be involved. If the school environment is not as

conducive to openness as it could be, those pupils and families are unlikely to identify themselves and may miss the opportunity to add their voices to the process.

Regarding the '*Report on the Responses to the Great Debate*', we agree with the new curriculum's purposes and the emphasis on well-being as a comprehensive approach in which all types of relationships can be a complementary part. This gives an opportunity to address issues of both sexual orientation and gender identity. As we previously stated, we do recognise that these are two distinct characteristics; nevertheless, awareness of all relationships can only be beneficial to all children and young people.

We also take on board the concerns expressed over different interpretations of the statements. However, the recommendations allow for cross-curriculum teaching; in our particular case, this could take the form, for example, of LGBT topics taught in Science, History and/or Religious Education. Therefore, we are in agreement with the majority of the comments, and in favour of autonomy for the schools in choosing the best way to deliver their lessons, although we re-iterate the necessity of age-appropriate and inclusive instructions on the contents to be applied to all schools to guarantee consistency in the delivery of SRE.

The report also mentioned how this cross-curriculum approach will make learning more relevant for children and young people; our concern is that unless this minimum SRE delivery standard is specified and agreed, the quality of the teaching the children and young people receive will be depending on whichever school they happen to be enrolled in and may not be relevant to LGBT pupils and families, but may again reflect the view of the majority and fail to acknowledge and incorporate the diversity of individual and family life.

Please let us make clear that it is not our intention to advocate for a rigid framework but rather to use the flexibility offered in the recommendations to work towards recognition of LGBT relationships, identities and families.

We would also like to emphasise the commitment of many schools to work with third sector providers and other organisations to provide children and

young people with knowledge on specific issues. We are committed on working with education providers to support them to fill knowledge gaps, working with the young people and delivering appropriate training for teaching staff, in a way that is suitable for the school's community.

In order to achieve this, the subject of relationships needs to be approached with clarity and openness. Therefore, we welcome the Minister's commitment to public debate and consultation. We are also looking forward to the publication of the action plan in the autumn and to contribute as stakeholder to the development of an inclusive curriculum.

Thank you for your time and support.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of ABFABB's participants and the Bridgend LGBT Forum

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