Mr Jake Pettman – written evidence (CCE0115)

Background & Introduction

1- The ‘Curriculum for Life’ campaign was started in 2015 by the UK Youth Parliament (UKYP) and then adopted by the West Sussex Youth Cabinet (WSYC), a group of youth representatives from across the county, its initial aim was to increase the amount of content covered in PSHE lessons. After a rethink in late 2016, the focus of the campaign shifted onto the consistency and quality of teaching. Due to the education budget cuts, it became inconsistent how young people were being taught, as this subject was deemed non-vital. Over the last two years, we have found that young people disagree and believe PSHE and learning a curriculum to prepare us for life is incredibly important. Our WSYC members noted that PSHE lesson quality was a lottery based on which school you went to.

2- To understand this further, we commissioned a survey which was sent out to 85% of W. Sussex schools. Young people responded brilliantly, the survey then allowed us to see what young people genuinely thought of PSHE, and by extension how it could be improved. We then analysed the results and decided on the best way to feed this information back. A report was to be sent to the Governors, and then to the Lords. We have also asked these schools to send their own survey to their students.

Methodology

3- Earlier this year, we commissioned a survey to establish how young people felt about PSHE. As this was a very broad and complex subject, I worked with the WSYC to come up with questions we thought would be relevant. I then consulted a local school, which for the purposes of this report shall remain anonymous. This was to make the questions ‘school friendly’, the questions were then adapted and wording changed as a result of the consultation feedback.

4- By this point we finally had some questions we could use, then the discussion took place around which would be the most appropriate method of distributing the survey. This was then decided as being an online survey, through the approved partner Survey Monkey, the link was to be distributed to the Head Teachers of 44 specifically selected schools, these schools were selected based on their active involvement in Youth Voice, and in particular with Make Your Mark.

5- A test version was sent to WSCC youth workers and the Youth Cabinet, around early April. Once everything had been finalised, the survey went live on the 27th of April. However, this survey was completely voluntary, this meant that our predicted yield was incredibly low.

Our Findings

Copy of full survey results is available if wanted, additionally I’m more than happy to provide additional oral evidence.

6- Our survey found that 53% of our respondents said that there wasn’t enough PSHE lessons, we believe this course is vital to a school’s sense of community. In addition, this subject is
vital to ensuring students become valued and contributing members of our society. It is an extended version of ‘citizenship’ courses, it is a way of learning about how our society works and therefore Parliament can insert a unit on democracy education.

7- Over 60% of students had their PSHE teachers also teaching another subject in school, this, we feel has contributed to the decline in quality for this subject. If additional funds were placed into this subject, we believe young people would feel more British and therefore more committed as a British citizen.

8- Subject knowledge for PSHE was also deemed by respondents to be ‘adequate’, this was our lowest option, 66.7% of students believe this. This proves the need for additional funds into a subject that is often overlooked.

There more questions and responses, due to my time being limited on this version, they are available but by request.

Our Recommendations

9- We would suggest that allocated lessons are devoted to the PSHE curriculum and all-round ‘citizenship’ education. As proven from many BYC (British Youth Council) projects, Britain’s young people don’t feel prepared for life or to leave education. This contributes to many young adults feeling isolated and left behind in the wider British society. Therefore it was voted the second most popular campaign in the annual Make Your Mark consultation. PSHE is in its infancy when it comes to gaining traction to be a vital academic subject, we have also asked schools to consider the viability of PSHE gaining an official qualification, as this may later become the UKYP (United Kingdom Youth Parliament) national campaign*.

10- We believe that a well thought out PSHE courses will lead to young people becoming better citizens, and instil a greater sense of community in the local area. Therefore the full report has been passed onto Rachel North, the West Sussex County Council’s Director of Communities, and Deborah Myers the WSCC Director of Education. This can be promoted by allowing local communities to come into schools and deliver sessions. West Sussex is lucky to have the internationally famous Rolls Royce, who do fantastic work in engaging young people in education programs. Companies like this can instil a greater sense of community, which can break down a lot of walls for isolated communities.

11- We recommend that this subject is treated in the same light as others already on the curriculum. In addition, as the survey suggested, to employ outside speakers to deliver some lessons, taking the burden off a single teacher, engaging students and increasing the school’s role in the community all in one go. It might be worth school’s outsourcing PSHE lessons to the local community, as explained in paragraph 10.

Summary & Future Actions

12- I acknowledge and appreciate that the Lords are incredibly busy with this committee, and that this report is a lot to cover. I will be thankful if this report is considered as evidence, or equally if the theory is expanded further with an oral sitting.
13- All of the findings in this report, results from this survey, and one commissioned within a school, it provides an accurate picture as to young people’s views on PSHE, community and engagement. I believe this sort of course will increase the number of young people voting if they understand the democratic system.

Accreditations & Thanks
Special Thanks to the (Anonymous) school for engaging in the consultation, West Sussex Youth Cabinet for co-authoring the report, MYP for East Arun, Adur & Worthing, WSCC Voice and Participation Workers & Press Officers, House of Lords Select Committee Clerk, The 44 schools who engaged with the survey, Most importantly, the young people who took part.

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