

2001/309

28

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Rathgael House, Bangor, BT19 7PR

URGENT

CORRESPONDENCE

Reference: COR/648/2001

Raised By: Iris Robinson MLA; MP

Subject: TEACHING GUIDES ON SEX EDUCATION IN POST-PRIMARY SCHOOLS

Referred To:

MR BRADLEY

Date Referred:

21/09/2001

ACTION REQUIRED

Please provide advice and a draft reply for signature by the Minister.

To be with Private Office not later than 02/10/2001 before Close of Play

For further information etc.

Miss Breffny Livingstone

Private Office

Rathgael House Tel:- 028

Copied To For Information

MR PEOVER

Scanned Document:

Julie
Cop 1 of this book is being forwarded.
Mr Webster is not correct in saying
that it has been approved for use in schools.
The list in CSEA RSE Guidance is of books
which have been identified as potentially
useful. They are not endorsed by CSEA
and schools should review them first
to any use. in endorsing the background
we could possibly endorse a copy of the circular.
Ann 24.9

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Miss Breffny Livingstone

Private Office

Rathgael House Tel:- 028 9127 9618

Copied To For Information**MR PEOVER****Scanned Document:**



DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS

from the Minister, Martin McGuinness MP MLA

COR 648/2001

Alderman Iris Robinson MP MLA
2B James Street
NEWTOWNARDS
BT23 4DY

Your Ref: IR/170901/JR

5th October 2001

Dear Iris,

Thank you for your letter of 17 September, raising the concerns expressed by [REDACTED] regarding teaching resources included in the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum and Assessment's (CCEA) recently published "Guidance for Post-Primary Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education" (RSE).

[REDACTED] is incorrect in saying that the CCEA has recommended or approved resources for use in post-primary schools as teaching guides on sex education. The list of resources included in the CCEA's RSE Guidance (copy enclosed) have been identified, during the consultation phases of the development of the guidance, by teachers from both primary and post-primary schools as useful when developing an RSE policy or programme. The CCEA makes it very clear that their inclusion does not imply endorsement and strongly recommends that schools review all resources to be used with pupils prior to any use. This recommendation is designed to ensure that any resource used reinforces the key messages which the school wishes to endorse and that classroom activities which are provided are appropriate to the specific groups of pupils. Schools are also encouraged, when choosing resources, to seek advice from the appropriate advisers of the Education and Library Boards, Health and Social Services Boards, school health doctors and nurses and education officers of the various churches. I should also point out that neither my Department nor the Council prescribes which resources schools should use in delivering the curriculum. This is entirely a matter for the individual schools.

RSE is a sensitive issue and I appreciate the concerns that have been expressed over the content of material available to children. However, schools as you know, have an important role to play in the process of preparing young people for adult life. Their duties, set out in the Education Reform (Northern Ireland) Order 1989, include promoting the spiritual, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of pupils, and preparing them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life. The purpose of the RSE Guidance is to encourage schools to teach sex education in a sensitive manner which is in harmony with the ethos of the school and in conformity with the moral and religious principles of the parents and the school management authorities.

Teaching should take place, therefore, within a caring moral context, stressing the value and importance of stable, loving personal relationships, parental responsibilities and family life. Pupils should also be taught to understand the importance of self-restraint, dignity, respect for themselves and others and acceptance of responsibility.

My Department has also suggested that schools may find it helpful to explain to parents, before a programme of RSE is instigated, how they intend to approach this sensitive subject, and what aspects will be covered in the course of the programme. Schools should then take account of any parental concerns expressed to them and, as far as possible, make alternative arrangements for any pupil whose parent wishes him/her to be excused from particular, or all, sex education classes.

I hope this will help to alleviate any concerns that you and [REDACTED] might have about the content and manner of the delivery of sex education in Northern Ireland schools.

Best wishes,
Martin.

MARTIN McGUINNESS MP MLA
Minister for Education

COR 648/01

FROM: Alastair Bradley
Curriculum and Assessment Branch

DATE: 2nd October 2001

TO: PS/MINISTER

ISSUE: Alderman Iris Robinson MP MLA has written to the Permanent Secretary raising concerns from a member of the public regarding teaching resources for sex education.

TIMESCALE: Routine

RECOMMENDATION: That the Minister should respond in line with the attached draft.

BACKGROUND

1. Iris Robinson MP MLA has written to the Permanent Secretary raising concerns expressed by a member of the public, [REDACTED], regarding material which he claims is obscene, being included as a teaching resource in the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examination and Assessment's (CCEA) recently published 'Guidance for Post-Primary Schools: Relationships & Sexuality Education' (RSE).

2. [REDACTED] wrote to Mrs Robinson on 13 September following a meeting he attended where Mr Colin Hart, Director of the Christian Institute, reported that some obscene material had been approved for use in sex education in secondary schools in Northern Ireland. He claims the publication 'Taking Sex Seriously' (by Cohen and Wilson, Healthwise Helpline Ltd 1994) is recommended in CCEA's guide and contains some disturbing lessons. He gives examples of such lessons: role playing the part of a homosexual person 'coming out', buying a packet of condoms for homework and discussing as a class the full range of sexual activities including group sex and sado-masochism. He adds that children are being taught that these activities are normal and in some cases encouraged to experiment.

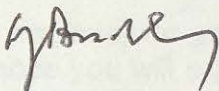
3. [REDACTED] is not correct in saying that CCEA has recommended or approved such resources for use in schools. CCEA has included a list of resources in its RSE Guidance which were identified by teachers, during the consultation phases of the development of the guidance, C&A/Minister's Cases/2965.

as useful when developing an RSE policy and programme. The resources reflect a wide range of morals and values and offer a variety of teaching strategies and activities. The Council makes it very clear that their inclusion does not imply endorsement and strongly recommends that schools review all resources to be used with pupils prior to any use. This is designed to ensure that any resource used reinforces the key messages which the school wishes to endorse and that they provide activities which are appropriate to the specific groups of pupils. A set of questions is also included in the guidance to assist teachers when making judgements about the suitability of resources.

4. It is a matter for individual schools to determine what resources they will use to deliver the curriculum. The Department (or CCEA) does not prescribe the use of any particular materials.

5. In addition, when choosing resources, teachers are encouraged to seek advice from the appropriate advisers of the Education and Library Boards, Health and Social Services Boards, school health doctors and nurses and education officers of the various churches. Schools are also advised to explain fully to parents, before a programme of RSE is instigated, how they intend to approach this sensitive subject and to take account of any concerns expressed.

6. A draft reply to Mrs Robinson is attached.



A J BRADLEY

☎ 59258

Cor 648/2001

Alderman Iris Robinson MP MLA

Tel: (028) 9182 7701

Fax: (028) 9182 7703

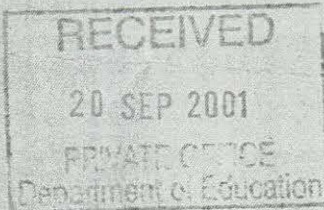


HOUSE OF COMMONS
LONDON SW1A 0AA

Please reply to:

2B James Street
Newtownards
BT23 4DY

Mr Gerry McGinn
The Permanent Secretary
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Bangor
BT19 7PG



Private office -
for reply please

Monday 17th September 2001
Our Ref: IR/170901/JR

ACK'D A/B

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20/9

REFERRED TO MR BRADLEY

Dear Mr McGinn,

I have been contacted by a concerned member of the public, [REDACTED] who has brought to my attention some obscene material which he claims is to be included as "teaching guides" on sex education in our post-primary schools.

I would ask you to explain why, if this is in fact accurate, that such graphic material is being used in our schools here? Why is the Department of Education encouraging our young people to "experiment" in acts which should not be the topic of school learning? Would you not agree that this type of approach only goes to encourage young people to become sexually active at a young age?

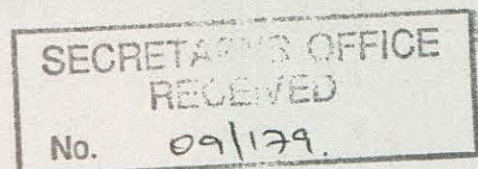
I enclose, for your attention, a copy of the letter I received from [REDACTED] and hope you will explain the Department's attitude to this. As far as I am concerned, I would vehemently oppose such lessons being introduced in schools across Northern Ireland, and I am sure that other public representatives and parents right across the Province would feel equally as shocked as I do.

I look forward to hearing from you soon on this matter.

Best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

Alderman Iris Robinson MP MLA
Member of Parliament for Strangford



Enc's

IMPORTANT: Please quote our Reference Number on all future correspondence.

[REDACTED]
13th September 2001

Dear Mrs Robinson,

On Monday night (10th September 2001) I attended a meeting at which Colin Hart, Director of the Christian Institute, was guest speaker. Mr Hart gave an informative talk, but sadly reported that some obscene material has been approved for use in sex education in secondary schools in Northern Ireland.

The Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum Examinations & Assessment (CCEA) in its current teaching guide "Guidance for Post-Primary Schools: Relationships & Sexuality Education" has recommended some sexually explicit literature.

The particular booklet "Taking Sex Seriously" (by Cohen & Wilson, Healthwise Helpline Ltd 1994), is recommended on page 34 of the CCEA's guide, and contains some disturbing lessons. The booklet is designed for use with 11 to 14 year-olds, and the lessons involve children:

- role playing the part of a homosexual person "coming out"
- for homework, buying a packet of condoms from a chemist shop
- discussing as a class "the full range of sexual activities" including group sex, sado-masochism and anal intercourse
- using plastic sex toys to demonstrate the use of contraceptives

Other activities included are too foul to describe. But children are being taught that these things are normal and in some cases encouraged to experiment. One trusts that teachers will never use this material, however the CCEA has still approved it for the 'education' of children.

It is difficult to think of a good reason why children should be taught these things, and such an approach will only encourage young teenagers to become sexually active. Surely we need to be adopting an abstinence programme as taught in some schools in the US.

I know that the New Labour Government is sympathetic to the 'permissive' approach. I read the comments of Tessa Jowell MP, when as minister for employment she stated that marriage is unnecessary and should not be taught to children as the ideal. I am also aware of what the Labour-controlled Executive has done in Scotland in repealing Clause 28. But surely New Labour has no electoral mandate to foist the 'political correctness' agenda on Northern Ireland?

I write to bring this matter to your attention and to ask that you oppose the use of such literature in our schools.

Yours faithfully,
[REDACTED]