

2001/322

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

Rathgael House, Bangor, BT19 7PR

URGENT

CORRESPONDENCE

Reference: COR/678/2001
Raised By: Jim Wells MLA

Subject: REQUEST TO WITHDRAW BOOKLET 'TAKING SEX SERIOUSLY'
FROM CURRICULUM X REF: COR 661 & 648/2001

Referred To:

MR BRADLEY

Date Referred:

09/10/2001

ACTION REQUIRED

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

To be with Private Office not later than 18/10/2001 before Close of Play

For further information etc. contact:

Mrs Gail Jackson
Private Office
Rathgael House Tel:- 028 9127 9304

Copied To For Information
MR PEOVER

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DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

AN ROINN OIDEACHAIS

from the Minister, Martin McGuinness MP MLA

COR 678/2001

Mr James H Wells MLA
2 Belfast Road
BALLYNAHINCH
BT24 8DZ

12 October 2001

Dear Jim,

Thank you for your letter of 3 October regarding teaching resources included in the Northern Ireland Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment's (CCEA) recently published "Guidance for Post-Primary Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education" (RSE).

First of all, I should point out that it is not correct to say 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 or 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 might have about the content and manner of the delivery of sex education in Northern Ireland schools.

Many best wishes,
Martin.

MARTIN McGUINNESS MP MLA
Minister for Education

COR 678/01

FROM: Alastair Bradley
Curriculum and Assessment Branch

DATE: 11th October 2001

TO: PS/MINISTER

ISSUE: Mr James H Wells MLA has written to the Permanent Secretary raising concerns regarding teaching resources for sex education.

TIMESCALE: Routine

RECOMMENDATION: Alderman Iris Robinson MP MLA, Revd Martin Smyth MP and Mr Mervyn Carrick MLA also wrote recently to the Permanent Secretary raising the same concerns (COR 648/01, COR 661/01 & COR 674/01). This advice and draft reply takes the same line.

BACKGROUND

1. Mr James Wells MLA has written to the Permanent Secretary regarding a booklet 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. Mr Wells claims the publication 'Taking Sex Seriously' (by Cohen and Wilson, Healthwise Helpline Ltd 1994) has been recommended as a teaching aid by CCEA'. He is concerned about the suitability of some of the lessons for 11 to 14 year old children. He gives examples of such lessons: role playing the part of a homosexual person 'coming out', buying a packet of condoms, discussing as a class the full range of sexual activities including group sex and sado-masochism. He adds that some of the other activities included in the booklet are too foul to describe.

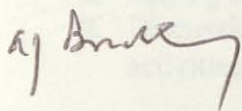
3. Mr Wells is not correct in saying that CCEA has recommended such resources for use in schools. CCEA has included a list of resources in its RSE Guidance which were identified by teachers, during the consultation phases of the development of the guidance, as useful when developing an RSE policy and 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 Mr Wells is attached.



A J BRADLEY

☎ 59258



Northern Ireland
Assembly

Parliament Buildings
Belfast BT4 3XX

8/10 J. Secretary - to see
J. Private Office -
for action pl.

2 Belfast Road
Ballynahinch
Co Down
BT24 8DZ

The Permanent Secretary
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
Bangor
Co Down

JH
8/10.

3 October 2001

Dear Sir

I have recently learnt that a booklet known as 'Taking Sex Seriously' has been recommended by the Northern Ireland Council for Curriculum Assessment, as a suitable aid for teaching children aged 11 to 14.

Included in this booklet are lessons on the following subjects -

1. Role playing the part of a homosexual person 'coming out'
2. Buying a packet of condoms
3. Discussions as a class on what is described as 'the full range of sexual activities' including group sex, and sado masochism

Some of the other activities included in the booklet are too foul to describe.

I am appalled that the CCEA has approved this booklet for the 'Education' of children in Northern Ireland.

I would be grateful if you could investigate this matter urgently with a view to having it withdrawn from use in this part of the United Kingdom.

Yours sincerely

James H Wells MLA
(Assemblyman for South Down)

