The Rt Hon Nadhim Zahawi MP

Secretary of State for Education

House of Commons

London

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 7 April 2022

Dear Nadhim Zahawi,

We read with alarm the recent report on sexual abuse in residential schools published by the Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse. According to this report nearly 42 per cent of child sexual abuse reports made to Operation Hydrant, the police body which oversees historic sexual abuse cases, were said to have been connected with an educational setting.

With these horrific cases in mind we would like to draw your attention to the state of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in schools. The report makes certain favourable claims about this subject. It is stated that RSE helps raise children’s awareness and helps them to ‘stay safe’ and that RSE plays ‘an important role in preventing harmful sexual behaviour between children’. There may be cases where this is true. However, in our research over the years we have found that RSE can often exacerbate the very problems that it is supposed to solve. This is particularly the case when schools use external RSE providers many of whom use age-inappropriate resources. Let us give just a few examples.

**Brook Traffic Light Tool.** Developed by the Brook organisation, this tool claims to support “professionals working with children and young people by helping them to identify and respond appropriately to sexual behaviours.”However, among the sexual behaviours deemed appropriate for a 13-year-old are “consenting oral and/or penetrative sex with others of the same or opposite gender who are of similar age and developmental ability.” According to Brook, these behaviours “reflect safe and healthy sexual development” and are worthy of “positive feedback.” This clearly undermines the age of consent. We acknowledge that Brook now claims that the Traffic Light Tool has undergone ‘extensive review and development’ though it is not clear what this means or whether or not the most objectionable aspects have been removed. Either way, earlier versions of the tool continue to be used in schools.

**It Happens.** This organisation caused considerable scandal last year when it conducted an RSE lesson at Winchester College in which it told boys of 13 and 14 that where they ‘both want to have sex and you both have sex, you are unlikely to be prosecuted from that because its not in the public interest’ and further stated: ‘It’s just two 14 year olds who want to have sex with each other who are consensually having sex’.

**Proud Trust.** This LGBT group promotes to children as young as 13 a programme called Sexuality aGender V2 which includes a dice game that encourages children to discuss explicit sexual acts based on the roll of a dice. Children throw a dice featuring the names of body parts and young people are encouraged to discuss potential sexual acts connected with those parts.

**School of Sexuality Education**. This group has worked in many schools across the country and claims to have worked with 67,332 young people. It claims that its approach to sex education is ‘equality/equity focused’,

‘intersectional’, ‘rights-based and empowering’ and ‘decolonising’. All of this language is highly ideological and suggests a heavy level of indoctrination. The group also promotes vulgar and inappropriate classroom activities such as encouraging school children to mould genitalia out of playdough and it was involved in advising on the creation of a stage performance called The Family Sex Show which contains nudity but is nonetheless considered suitable for children as young as five.

These are just a few examples which serve to illustrate that children are being exposed to sexual material long before they are of an age mature enough to grasp its implications and that many of the external groups invited into schools show a contempt for the age of consent.

The practices highlighted above fly in the face of the government’s own guidance on RSE which states that all teaching on sexual matters should be ‘sensitive, age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate and delivered with reference to the law.’ When this is not the case and especially when the age of consent is trivialised or undermined, we risk very serious consequences for children. We highlighted some of these consequences in our report *Unprotected* in which we exposed how certain local authorities had had a negligent attitude to child sex abuse because they had come to view underage sex as just a normal part of growing up.  We enclose a copy of *Unprotected* for your interest.

The Department for Education needs to urgently investigate the role played by external organisations in RSE and ensure that groups that undermine the age of consent and promote age-inappropriate materials and activities are no longer invited into schools. All guidance also needs to be reviewed to ensure it does not allow loopholes that can be used to promote such activities. Where confidential information on contraception is provided to under-16s without parental consent, this should be stopped. All government departments should ensure that any safeguarding tool, and any advice or guidance that they provide or signpost, places a strong emphasis on the age of consent and in no way communicates the message that sexual activity under the age of 16 is a legitimate choice worthy of positive feedback. There also needs to be a much greater emphasis on marriage within RSE.

We believe these measures are essential if our children are to be protected from harm. We do hope you will engage with us on this issue.

We look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely



Piers Shepherd

Senior Researcher

Cc Robin Walker MP, Minister for School Standards