

BHA BRIEFING: Children, Schools and Families Bill - amendments 251, 252 and NC7 - Commons Committee Stage

Monday 1st February, 2010

The British Humanist Association (BHA) is the national charity representing and supporting the non-religious. Working for more inclusive practices and rational approaches in education form a key part of our mission and we are members of the National Children Bureau's Sex Education Forum. We strongly urge all members to support amendments 251, 252 and NC7 to the Children Schools and Families Bill.

Amendment 251 and Clause 11

Mr Ken Purchase

251

Page 14, Clause 11, paragraph 4 (7), line 3:

Leave out 'should' and insert 'must'

- 4 (7) The third principle is that PSHE ~~should~~ **must** be taught in a way that -
- (a) endeavours to promote equality,
 - (b) encourages acceptance of diversity, and
 - (c) emphasises the importance of both rights and responsibilities.

The BHA welcomes that the Children, Schools and Families Bill proposes to make Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education part of the National Curriculum. However, we are concerned how some schools (and particularly those with a religious ethos) will approach issues, such as sexual diversity.

We welcome that paragraph 4 (7) of clause 11 stipulates that schools '... should teach PSHE in a way that endeavours to promote equality, [and] encourages acceptance of diversity'. However, we are still very concerned it is not strong enough.

Amendment 251 will strengthen this section and help to ensure that schools teach PSHE in ways that promote and encourage acceptance and do not advocate homophobic perspectives. Other parts of clause 11 enable schools to teach and present religious, cultural and other perspectives in PSHE and so this amendment would do nothing to prevent schools from teaching about these viewpoints.

Amendment 251 is in accord with the views expressed by the leaders of all three of the main Parties, as well as great many other parliamentarians. We note with encouragement that all three Party leaders supported the 2009 anti-homophobic bullying week campaign organised by the lesbian, gay and bi-sexual charity Stonewall¹. We also note comments made in recent weeks by the leaders of both the Conservative² and Liberal Democrat³ Parties on the subject of the portrayal of homosexuality in schools. **The BHA wholly supports this amendment.**

¹ http://www.stonewall.org.uk/what_you_can_do/campaigning_opportunities/anti_bullying_week/3578.asp

² In a Daily Telegraph article on 26th January David Cameron was quoted saying 'We do need good sex and relationship education. That education should teach people about equality, that we treat people the same whether they are gay or straight ... I think that is really important that we embed that in the ethos of our education'.
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/newsttopics/politics/7079542/David-Cameron-teach-children-to-treat-gay-people-equally.html>

³ In an interview for the February 2010 edition of Attitude Magazine Nick Clegg agreed that there should be a legal requirement for schools, including faith schools, to teach that homosexuality is normal and harmless.
<http://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/clegg-lays-down-law-to-cameron-on-gay-rights-1866116.html>

Amendment 252, NC7 and Clause 14

Mr Ken Purchase	252
Page 15, Clause 14, line 28: Leave out Clause 14.	
<i>Removal of exemption from sex and relationships education</i>	
To move the following Clause:-	NC7
‘Section 405 of the Education Act 2006 shall be omitted.’.	

Clause 14 of the Bill amends the existing right parents have to withdraw their children from sex education, so that they can only remove their children from Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) up until their child is 15. Together amendment 252 and New Clause 7 will remove the right of parents to withdraw their children from SRE altogether. The BHA unequivocally supports this amendment because we believe all children have a right to receive SRE.

Good SRE is known to reduce unwanted pregnancies, reduce the spread of sexually transmitted infections, and equip young people with the language and tools to be clear about personal boundaries, understand appropriate and inappropriate behaviour, to be able to resist pressure assertively and to know who to talk to and how to ask for help if and when they need it. For older children it helps them resist pressure, make safe choices and be able to challenge and be critical of misleading and inappropriate messages about sex in the media.

If children do not receive SRE then their present and future health and wellbeing is put at risk. The rights of children and their welfare should be paramount. We believe the law must firmly support a child's right to receive education about relationships.

Allowing the right of withdrawal to continue is out of step with the views of the UK Youth Parliament, education professionals and with general public opinion. A Mori poll in October 2009 of 1791 adults showed that 80% of people (81% of parents) agreed that every child should attend sex and relationship lessons as part of the National Curriculum⁴.

At present the parental right of withdrawal is hardly ever used. Introducing a new cut-off point for right of withdrawal will only encourage some parents to withdraw their children from vital SRE lessons until they lose that right. We believe it is very harmful that the Government wishes to send out the signal that 15 is an appropriate age to first receive SRE. This is the worst kind of concession to give to a very marginal religious lobby, which will impact some of those vulnerable young people who most need comprehensive SRE from a young age.

We urge members to support these amendments.

For more information, contact Paul Pettinger, Education Campaigns Officer, on paul@humanism.org.uk or 020 7462 4991.

⁴ <http://www.teachernet.gov.uk/docbank/index.cfm?id=14448>