

Although Somerset has always provided some training and support for school governors, the requirements of the Education (No. 2) Act 1986 highlighted the need to put this training on a regular and systematic basis. The Local Education Authority reacted by allocating staff time for administration and by setting up a working party to consider the future basis of a training and support scheme.

The aim of this scheme was essentially to raise governors' awareness of the need for training in the use of the new powers bestowed upon them by the 1986 Act. A series of five training videos were produced in association with the College of St Mark & St John (Plymouth) and the South West Church of England Dioceses as a stimulus for initial training for all governors. In order to provide further training, a County Co-ordinator was appointed together with six Area Organisers.

The Education (No. 2) Act 1986 gave governors the responsibility to produce the sex education policy for their schools. The Adviser for Health Related Education, Gwen Cavill, was instrumental in providing appropriate courses in each of the six geographic areas to enable governors to fulfil this obligation.

PROGRAMME

In preparation for this initiative, contact was made with Anne Hovey, Director of the Health Education Authority's School Governors' Project, who invited a delegation from Somerset to visit one of her training sessions on sex education. Following this visit, the initial programme was devised and delivered during 1987/88. The aims were:

- To review resources available to schools.
- To examine the content and approaches to ensure effective sex education of pupils.

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A training scheme for school governors in Somerset

- To look at the implications for schools and colleges of the legislation as it applies to sex education.
- To define the term 'sex education' within the framework of growth, personal relationships, responsibility and family life.

CONTENT

Letters of invitation were sent to governing bodies and headteachers of each school. On average, between 60 and 70 people attended the training sessions in each geographic area, and the content of the programme included:

Issues affecting school governors

This consisted of a presentation on the sections of the 1986 Education Act relevant to the governors, together with statements from *Health Education from 5 to 16* (HMI Curriculum Matters 6) and the DES Circular 11/87.

Statements on sex education

Pairs of statements were distributed at random. Governors were asked to find a colleague holding an identical statement and to discuss it with their partner. This served the dual purpose of mixing people and provoking discussion.

Some examples are shown in the box overleaf. After a few minutes' discussion, the governors were asked to voice opinions which

were particularly relevant or controversial.

What are our needs?

This provided an opportunity for the governors to identify the issues which they wished to be addressed during the evening and every effort was made to accommodate these requests.

Clarifying views about sex education

Individually, the governors were given a series of statements such as 'sex education is different from other forms of education', and asked to record whether they agreed or disagreed with each statement. They were then asked to confer with another colleague, compare their responses, and come to a consensus wherever possible.

The trainer was able to highlight particular issues by taking feedback on those areas where a consensus was difficult to achieve.

Sex education in school and society

In groups, the governors were asked to brainstorm young people's sources of information on sexual matters and then to identify the three most influential. The ensuing discussion usually identified that the most influential sources were not necessarily the most reliable. Whilst sex education was often regarded as the responsibility of

parents, it was agreed that children often felt unable to discuss such issues with their children and appreciated the support offered by teachers.

Sex education in the curriculum

A short input was given recommending a whole-school approach to sex education and identifying the benefits of the cross-curricular approach and the importance of a progressive and developmental spiral curriculum for young people from 4½ to 18 years of age.

Personal action plan

Headteachers and their governors jointly considered what action was necessary for the successful formulation of a sex education policy in their own school and to identify a realistic time-scale for implementation.

Evaluation

Finally, participants completed a questionnaire to provide feedback on the session and to ascertain future training needs.

DEMAND

The success of these sessions led to the demand for further training in each geographic area of the county during the following academic year. Only governors were invited to subsequent rounds of training. This coincided with the reconstitution of some governing bodies, perpetuating the need for help in the production of school policies, whilst some governors wished to investigate more fully the implementation of sex education within the curriculum.

Consequently a new programme was devised which retained the original aims whilst incorporating additional aspects.

LEA guidelines

'Pathways to personal growth', the LEA guidelines on sex education from 4½ to 18 years, had recently been published and circu-

Health Education from 5 to 16 Curriculum Matters 6

AN HMI SERIES

Extracts from this HMI document were found helpful in setting the context of health education in the school curriculum.

'Parents should decide what form of sex education their children receive.'

'Young people should be given advice on contraception at an early age.'

'Sex education is best taught by health professionals such as the school nurse or local health visitors.'

'Teaching about sex encourages promiscuity among young people.'

'It is appropriate that governors should decide whether or not a child should be withdrawn from sex-education lessons at the request of parents.'

'Sexual relationships should be encouraged only between members of the opposite sex.'

Some of the statements used in the first training session. Participants discussed them in pairs before reporting back.

lated to each school. A review of this document provided a local update for governors.

What is sex education?

This session was adapted to provide an opportunity for the governors to explore their own philosophy of sex education. Firstly, each individual was asked to write down a few key words which best described their perception of 'sex education'. After sharing this with a partner a single

statement embracing the thoughts of both people was produced.

Groups of four repeated this process to devise joint statements, whereupon participants circulated and read the views expressed by other groups. The important aspects and common philosophy were highlighted through subsequent discussion initiated by the trainer.

This procedure was commended as an appropriate strategy for devising a school policy on sex education in individual institutions.

Subsequent feedback suggested the method to be very effective.

Sex education in the curriculum

Within the context of the whole-school policy, a broad and balanced view of sex education, encompassing issues such as responsibility, self-image, relationships and family life was recommended. The necessity for a spiral curriculum was expounded to ensure progression and continuity in education as young people develop physically, emotionally, and intellectually.

Inputs, serving as exemplars of good practice focussing on process, teaching strategies and content, were given by practitioners from the primary and secondary phases.

Governors' responsibilities — personal action plan

In addition to forward planning, governors were encouraged to explore the possibility of networking between groups of similar schools or between partner primary and secondary schools.

FURTHER SUPPORT

The training sessions were well attended, and positive feedback was received. In consequence, the County Co-ordinator identified the need for further support for governing bodies. To continue the developmental process, the place of sex education needed to be discussed within the wider context of health education and the National Curriculum.

This programme is currently being delivered in the same geographic locations as before. The sessions continue to be participatory in nature and provide an opportunity for governors to:

- Review their own school policy on sex education.
- Reflect on the school as a health-promoting institution.
- Receive an update on health education as a cross-curricular

The format of the written school policy.

The time-scale for implementation.

Can sex education be excluded from the secular curriculum in the light of its inclusion in the science orders of the National Curriculum?

Sensitive handling of requests by parents for withdrawal of pupils from sex education lessons.

Legal aspects of including 'homosexuality' in sex education programmes.

Distinguishing between giving advice and information on contraception.

Interpretation of the meaning of 'sex education'.

The need to enhance the partnership between home and school by publicising the content and schedule of the programme.

Should the teaching staff be involved in formulating the policy statement?

What resources are available in terms of personnel and materials?

The need to review the policy statement on a regular basis.

The question of social and medical confidentiality.

Whose morals and what is a family, as referred to in the Education (No. 2) Act 1986?

Some of the issues raised by governors during the training sessions.

theme within the National Curriculum.

- Become more aware of HIV/AIDS education across the age range from 5-16 years.
- Explore the possible response to the discovery of cases of HIV/AIDS in either the young or adult population within a school.
- Consider the implications of such a scenario on the whole school policy.

Issues raised by governors

During the sessions many issues have been raised (see box). These issues have produced much stimulating discussion which has helped governors to clarify their personal views.

Summary

Training has been provided by members of the LEA advisory and support team together with teachers. This permitted the interaction of ideas and personalities, and produced skilled trainers able to operate in the widespread locations throughout the county.

In the future it is hoped to continue the happy and productive liaison which has evolved between the 'health team' and school governors by responding appropriately to their needs in this time of rapid educational change.

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