



Mr Paul Whiteman
General Secretary
National Association of Head Teachers
15.11-15.12 Millbank Tower
21-24 Millbank
London, SW1P 4QP

Mr Geoff Barton,
General Secretary, Association of
School & College Leaders,
2nd Floor, Peat House,
1 Waterloo Way,
Leicester, LE1 6LP

27 November 2023

Dear Mr Whiteman and Mr Barton,

RE: Media release from ASCL / NAHT (27th Oct 2023), in response to DfE press release (24th Oct 2023): “Education Secretary says parents can see sex education material”.

We are writing in response to the [media release](#) from the Association of Schools and College Leaders (ASCL) and the National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT), (27 Oct 2023), which was in direct response to the [press release](#) from the Department for Education (DfE) (24 Oct 2023) concerning making Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) teaching resources accessible to parents.

ParentPower is a nationwide advocacy group comprised of well-informed parents and highly experienced educators. We believe that the primary responsibility for the education of children rests with their parents, whose rights, in recent years, have been eroded to the detriment of the safety and wellbeing of the nation’s children and young people. We advise and support parents on educational matters, including helping with their concerns relating to RSHE.

The DfE [press release](#) (27 Oct), which called for transparency and effective collaboration between schools and parents in relation to RSHE teaching resources, was very much welcomed by ParentPower. It is well established that effective engagement with parents builds confidence in, and thus support for, curriculum content, which is why such collaboration features prominently in the DfE’s statutory RSHE guidance. This is especially important with regards to RSHE, given the sensitive nature of the subject, and the need to respect a wide variety of beliefs.



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In your [media release](#), which is a letter addressed to the Secretary of State for Education, the Rt Hon Gillian Keegan MP, from both yourself and Mr Geoff Barton of the ASCL, you made a number of points to which we feel compelled to respond:

1. You state that the Secretary of State for Education's letter was "spun" in such a way as to give the impression that she was "getting tough with recalcitrant schools for failing to provide access to these materials". Whether "spun" or not, we can verify, from our collective involvement with parents throughout the country, that there are many parents who report that there are indeed such "recalcitrant schools" who are failing to properly engage and consult with them, or who are paying only lip service to this statutory obligation. Our own [survey](#) of parents found that in 50% of cases they had been actively prevented from being allowed to view the RSHE teaching content used with their children.
2. You also state that "In reality, we think that the vast majority of schools already share RSHE materials with parents and that if there are examples where this has not happened for any reason, it is in a very small number of cases." We would welcome sight of the research to validate this claim, as your statement stands in complete contradiction to the countless testimonies and requests for support we receive from parents nationwide. Our [survey](#) found that 48% of parents who responded had never been consulted about RSHE teaching content, with **58%** of parents stating their children's school '**provided inadequate or no information**' about it. Where schools did consult, **55%** of parents felt the views they expressed '**had no influence at all**' on the outcome and what went on to be taught to their children.
3. You go on to say that "this simply isn't an issue which warrants a press release containing the comment from you: 'No ifs, no buts and no more excuses'. It is desperately disappointing that you as the Secretary State for Education – the very person who should be standing up for schools – instead chooses to denigrate them in pursuit of a headline". Whilst it is not our place to speak for the Secretary of State for Education, we feel that the language used is reflective of the pressing need to address the significant parental concerns and frustrations. These are borne out of the dismissive and uncollaborative attitude demonstrated by too many schools, where commercial confidentiality is often cited as a reason not to heed legitimate parental requests to view RSHE teaching content. Furthermore, rather than "denigrating" schools, we believe the Secretary of State for Education has provided much needed legal clarification to support schools with their statutory obligation to consult effectively with parents on RSHE.

4. You then state that *“this sort of thing undermines public institutions and feeds a breakdown of trust that is corrosive.”* At ParentPower, we believe that parental trust in our schools is actually being undermined by the proportion of schools which have not effectively engaged and consulted parents in the development and delivery of RSHE teaching content. As has been demonstrated by recent reports from the [New Social Covenant Unit](#) and [The Policy Exchange](#), many schools have relied on pre-prepared RSHE content from third party providers. Some of these providers are openly pushing contested gender theories as fact. Presenting such material to students in the absence of competing views contravenes the DfE’s statutory [impartiality guidance](#), and the legal requirements of the [Education Act 1996](#).
5. You state that *“we need political leaders to be encouraging parents to support schools rather than making that relationship more difficult”*. We at ParentPower acknowledge the difficulties that schools are facing, but we believe that transparency is key to fostering effective relationships between schools and parents. As such, it would be more productive to recognise that there are genuine concerns with RSHE provision in many schools, rather than trying to downplay both their extent and significance.
6. Lastly, you state that *“inflaming controversy over RSHE is hardly likely to encourage people into the profession or inspire confidence among teachers who are teaching this subject.”* Teachers have been severely impacted and even driven out of the profession, not by legitimate parental requests, but as a result of being corralled against their conscience to teach harmful and age-inappropriate material. Their objections, due to safeguarding concerns for their pupils, have at times been met with disciplinary action and even dismissal by their employers. Third party organisations providing training and RSHE resources have, in certain cases, also played a part in creating this climate of fear and intimidation, especially where schools have imposed RSHE programmes without adequate consultation. We believe that the clarity of the Secretary of State’s recent guidance on parental access to RSHE resources will assist teachers to feel their views will be heard too, as well as to have a better working relationship with the parents of the children in their school.

In summary, we consider that the legal clarity the Secretary of State has provided will enable schools to respond positively to all future parental requests to view RSHE resources. Previously, many schools may have thought themselves constrained by commercial confidentiality clauses with third-party providers. We call on you to use your considerable influence in education to support this entirely appropriate

approach, and to help promote a gold standard of transparency and collaboration. Doing so would go a long way towards calming the ongoing tensions between schools and parents. By making all RSHE teaching content easily available to parents, either online or as otherwise requested, parents will no longer have to rely on brief summaries or select previews that invariably omit content that could be a potential future cause of contention. This will assist parents and schools alike in fostering productive and trustworthy working relationships with each other for the sake of our children's education and welfare.

The findings of our parental survey mentioned above are featured on our website, see link below –

<https://parentpower.family/rse-survey-shows-parents-are-undermined-by-the-system/>

<https://parentpower.family/rshe-survey-parents-views-part-2/>

Please note, we are publishing this as an open letter,

Kind regards

Rev Lynda Rose,
Dr Tom Rogers,
Mr Edmund Matyjaszek

Directors of ParentPower

