

Briefing on updated Ofsted grade descriptors for PSHE education

In December 2013, Ofsted published [updated grade descriptors for PSHE education](#). These descriptors reflect Ofsted's updated criteria for making judgements on:

- the achievement of pupils in PSHE education
- the quality of teaching in PSHE education
- the quality of the PSHE education curriculum
- the quality of leadership in, and management of, PSHE education

Although your school may not experience an inspection which focuses on PSHE education specifically, these grade descriptors provide useful guidance on what Ofsted considers good practice in PSHE education. We have therefore prepared this summary of the changes and their implications for your practice.

Changes to descriptors for outstanding achievement of pupils in PSHE education

The grade descriptor for outstanding achievement no longer includes *"a strong understanding of the principles which underpin positive parenting..."* but now includes *"...an excellent understanding of [pupils'] human rights with regard to physical harm and sexual exploitation..."*

Further additions include: *"Pupils have developed discernment...know how to resist peer pressure effectively..."* and *"...understand very well how to seek further help and advice..."*

There are also new references to pupil resilience in the 'good' grade descriptor, indicating that Ofsted believes it to be a key concept.

As members will be aware, elements of personal finance education have moved to Citizenship in the [2014 National Curriculum](#). Ofsted's grade descriptors have therefore been updated so that outstanding PSHE education requires pupils to *"...understand well the links with work on personal finance in National Curriculum citizenship lessons..."* In order to meet this objective, school PSHE curricula should recognise that our financial choices are often driven by factors beyond the mathematical, for example peer influence and the influence of the media. Your PSHE curriculum should also consider the impact of debt on our relationships as well as our finances.

There is a stronger emphasis on mental health in these new grade descriptors. Ofsted make it clear that PSHE education is inadequate when *"pupils do not appreciate the importance of dangers to their mental health and/or do not know where to go to seek further help and advice..."*

In order to demonstrate your commitment to pupil mental health through the PSHE curriculum, it is important to consider mental health from two different perspectives: helping pupils to understand, recognise and challenge prejudices surrounding mental health conditions and offering pupils strategies and support to protect their own mental health.

Changes to descriptors for outstanding quality of teaching in PSHE education

The importance of appropriate learning objectives matched to well-considered, appropriate activities and the importance of active participation in learning are strengthened in the updated indicators. Another new addition to the judgements is a more explicit reference to resilience:

“Teachers are able to develop pupils’ resilience and ability to resist peer pressure very effectively; they help develop pupils’ confidence well and strengthen their attitudes to learning across the school curriculum.”

Inadequate teaching is described as follows:

“Teachers fail to develop pupils’ resilience and ability to resist peer pressure; pupils have not developed the confidence and assertiveness skills they need to keep themselves safe.”

This reinforces the importance of placing the PSHE curriculum at the heart of a school safeguarding policy in order to satisfy Ofsted criteria. Whilst it is essential that schools take action when a pupil is at risk, schools’ safeguarding policies should also consider the learning provided to help pupils to take responsibility for keeping themselves safe.

Changes to descriptors for outstanding quality of the curriculum in PSHE education

The use of local data, such as information about levels of smoking, obesity or teenage pregnancy, to inform planning, is strengthened in the grade descriptors. The document states that the curriculum should be designed “...taking into account local health and social data...”.

Ofsted are also looking for links to personal finance and citizenship, as set out in the newly added text below:

“The aspects of the programme relating to business, enterprise and money management link very well with the personal finance aspects of the citizenship programme.”

Suspended timetable or ‘drop down’ days continue to complement, rather than replace, a planned PSHE education programme and there is a more explicit requirement that such days “...are well-evaluated to inform curriculum planning.”

Changes to descriptors for outstanding leadership and management of PSHE education

This section remains largely unchanged except for one important addition. In order to be judged outstanding there is now an expectation that “...discriminatory language is tackled with vigour...” This addition, which sits alongside the expectation that prejudice-based bullying is tackled with vigour, is one which we welcome and which PSHE co-ordinators should consider as part of a whole school approach to discrimination and bullying.

To view the full Ofsted grade descriptors for all subjects, including PSHE, visit the [grade descriptors section of the Ofsted website](#)