Effective PSHE education: values, purposes and future directions

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Citation:

WILLIS, Benjamin, CLAGUE, Lucy and COLDWELL, Michael (2013). Effective PSHE education: values, purposes and future directions. Pastoral Care in Education: An International Journal of Personal, Social and Emotional Development, 31 (2), 99-111. [Article]

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Effective PSHE education: values, purposes and future directions

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Abstract

This article explores the perceived effectiveness of PSHE education in primary and secondary schools. It outlines the relationship between perceived effectiveness and a range of explanatory factors, linking these to the values and ethos of schools, differing views of the purposes of PSHE education, and longstanding policy agendas. We conclude by attempting to locate PSHE education in the new rapidly evolving policy context and discuss some potential ways forward as established means of support and challenge disappear. The data utilised in the paper come from a mapping and effectiveness study of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education in both primary and secondary schools throughout England, which was conducted by Sheffield Hallam University on behalf of the Department for Education (Formby et al, 2011).

Keywords: PSHE education, Values, Purposes, Wellbeing, Schools

Introduction

The PSHE Education Mapping and Effectiveness Study (Formby et al, 2011) was conducted between 2009 and 2010 by a research team from Sheffield Hallam University on behalf of the Department of Children, Schools and Families (now Department for Education), and is - at the time of writing - the largest study to date examining PSHE education in England. It focused on state-funded primary and secondary schools, and had two purposes. Findings relating to the first purpose - to

map current practice and provision in relation to PSHE Education[1] and its elements[2] have been presented and discussed in previous issues of Pastoral Care in Education, in relation to primary schools (Formby, 2011) and to secondary schools (Formby and Wolstenholme, 2012). In this paper, we look to the second purpose, to examine effective PSHE provision. We explore this in relation to the values and ethos of schools, the perceived purposes of PSHE and other influencing factors. We conclude by locating PSHE within a rapidly evolving policy context and discuss some potential ways forward as established means of support and challenge disappear.

The study

The data sources used in the study are detailed elsewhere (Formby, 2011; Formby and Wolstenholme, 2012). In brief, the study utilised a nationally representative survey of 1540 English primary and secondary schools (with 22% and 34% response rates for primary and secondary schools respectively), alongside interview and other data gathered from case study visits to nine primary schools and five secondary schools. In total 248 individuals participated in the case study work, from local authority representatives, to teachers, support staff, pupils and parents.

In relation to quantitative data, the findings reported in our earlier papers largely derived from analysis of questions aimed at mapping provision of PSHE and its constituent elements. In addition, a set of regression models were utilised to provide a measure of effectiveness (See Formby et al 2011, Appendix 4).The findings from these models were illuminated by the case study data, from both the viewpoint of the

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[1] To aid with the flow of this paper we shorten PSHE education to 'PSHE' from this point on.

[2] defined for the purposes of the research project as - in relation to 'personal wellbeing' - diet, nutrition and healthy lifestyles; drug, alcohol and tobacco education; emotional health and wellbeing; safety education; sex and relationships education and - in relation to 'economic wellbeing' - enterprise education; personal finance/financial capability and, for secondary schools, careers education and work-related learning.

analytical team and the participants. It is to these findings that we now turn our attention.

Effective PSHE

This section focuses on the perceived[3] effectiveness of PSHE provision in primary and secondary schools by examining case study and survey data along with further investigation via statistical modelling. We first examine which PSHE components were deemed to be more effective than others and then turn to the possible influences on effectiveness.

The vast majority of both primary and secondary school respondents felt they had effective PSHE overall, with 95% of primaries and 91% of secondaries surveyed viewing their provision as either *effective* or *very effective* (see Figure 1 below).

Figure 1 about here

Differences were apparent in relation to which elements of PSHE schools felt were being provided effectively. The personal wellbeing elements (the first five elements listed in Figure 1) were viewed as being *very effective* by over 40% of primaries and around 26% of secondary schools. Whereas economic wellbeing elements (the last four in Figure 1) were much less likely to be viewed as being effective by both primary and secondary schools compared with other elements.

In comparison with secondary schools, primary schools were less likely to view the economic wellbeing elements as effective, and more likely to view the personal wellbeing elements as effective. This finding is particularly evident in relation to

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[3] Difficulties exist around the extent to which the outcomes of PSHE education can be measured; the paper, and the study, therefore discusses the issue of effectiveness in relation to the research participants' *perceptions* of effectiveness.

emotional health and wellbeing where nearly 60% of primaries viewed their provision as very effective, compared to just 28% of secondary schools. As we will go on to discuss, this is likely to be related to the dominance of SEAL delivery in primary schools and the associated link to the core purpose of schooling.

The only PSHE element to be viewed as *less than effective* by a majority of primary schools was personal finance/financial capability, where 52% viewed their provision in this way and just 5% felt that it was *very effective*. Similar findings were found for enterprise education. Secondary schools were more positive, with around a quarter viewing their provision as *less than effective* for both personal finance, financial capability and enterprise education.

Drugs, alcohol and tobacco (DAT) education and sex and relationships education (SRE) were less likely to be viewed as effective in primaries compared to secondaries. DAT education was only viewed as *very effective* in around a fifth of primaries (21%) and a third of secondaries (33%); and SRE was viewed by almost a quarter (24%) of primaries and 38% of secondaries as *very effective.* As discussed by Formby, 2011, the findings here are in line with numerous other studies.

Factors associated with perceived effectiveness in PSHE

As noted above, statistical modelling was conducted to explore the extent to which a variety of factors were related to two measures of effectiveness:

1. Survey responses that identified PSHE provision overall in the respondent's school as very effective;
2. Outstanding judgments on three Ofsted inspection measures

A list of variables was compiled from the PSHE survey as possible influences on effectiveness (see Appendix for a full list of variables used), and an analysis of the relationships between the factors and both the perceived effectiveness measures and the Ofsted measures was conducted to isolate the statistically significant factors to be included in the model[4]. Multiple regression modelling was then separately conducted for primary and secondary schools.

In the rest of this section we discuss the factors that were linked to perceived effectiveness for primary and secondary schools, using the findings from this statistical modelling, linking these where appropriate to the case study data and the survey open responses.

Primary schools

Table 1 below lists the factors that proved to be linked to increased perceived effectiveness for primary schools.

Table 1 about here

Although coverage of all PSHE elements is associated in the statistical modelling with the largest effect on perceived effectiveness, only one of the primary case study school interviewees picked up its importance; with the senior leader in that school identifying that coverage of elements not covered by SEAL units was often weak and therefore teaching was not effective.

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[4] The analysis revealed that very few PSHE-related factors proved to be significantly linked to outstanding Ofsted judgments in these areas (as might be expected, since the Ofsted 'wellbeing' judgements relate to a host of issues well beyond the remit of PSHE). Given this, the current paper does not report on this part of the regression analysis. For further details on this analysis, see Formby et al, 2011, chapter 7.

CPD was not mentioned explicitly in the case study primary schools, although staff skills, confidence and commitment were mentioned, all of which can be influenced by effective professional development.

Only one case study primary school identified consulting pupils as being important, but pupil focus group data showed the importance of taking account of pupils' views (see Formby, 2011 and Formby and Wolstenholme, 2012 for more on this). Parental engagement and consultation were mentioned by three of the primary case study schools as important.

The role of the PSHE coordinator was central in all of the case study primary schools, and this linked to the commitment of the senior leadership team and the value placed by the school on PSHE, which we come back to in the next section.

However, none of the case study school interviewees explicitly mentioned assessment in their responses in relation to effectiveness, even though the survey revealed this to be a statistically relevant factor.

Secondary schools

Table 2 shows the equivalent set of factors for secondary schools.

Table 2 about here

As with primary schools, the role of the PSHE coordinator was seen to be very important in secondary schools in the case study sample. For example, in one school the current PSHE coordinator was changing roles, and was not due to be replaced. She noted that '*now that we won't have a leader...that's a big worry*', and felt that parts of PSHE would begin to fall by the wayside. Also linked to PSHE leadership was the issue of commitment to PSHE and valuing the subject.

Discrete PSHE lessons were identified as being important for effective PSHE teaching in some secondary schools, with others suggesting the amount of curriculum time was an important influence. Curriculum time was also mentioned by around 30% of the 337 responding schools who made open comments on effectiveness, centring on having frequent, discrete PSHE lessons.

The importance of consulting with parents was mentioned by a governor at one school, and others also discussed consulting pupils.

Two secondary schools mentioned assessment as a factor associated with effectiveness of delivery, noting that without good assessment, effectiveness of delivery could not be measured. We do not have space to discuss it here, but assessment of PSHE was a contentious issue across the case study schools (see Formby et al, 2011, chapter 6).

The status of PSHE

Further analysis of the qualitative data revealed there to be an additional issue underlying a number of the factors that emerged as statistically significant in the primary and secondary models (such as the role of the PSHE coordinator; discussion of PSHE at parents' evenings; inclusion of PSHE in assessment policy): the *status* of PSHE.

In most of the primary schools there was clear evidence of high status being accorded to PSHE in a number of demonstrable ways. This was most clearly evidenced by senior leader support or strategic leadership: in four primaries, a Deputy head led PSHE, in one, the Head teacher was PSHE lead and in another the Head teacher was previously PSHE lead.

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In contrast, the status of PSHE was very clearly seen to be lower in secondary schools, compared with the primary schools. None of the secondary schools claimed the subject had high status, although in three schools senior PSHE leads claimed it had improved more recently for various reasons: it underpinned a new academic curriculum; a new PSHE lead had raised its profile and status; and a change from tutor delivery to timetabled lessons taught by specialists had improved its status.

Discussion: linking purposes, values and policy agendas

We suggest that the differences in relation to the status of PSHE noted above between primary and secondary schools are linked to two related underlying issues: firstly, differing views on the *purpose* of PSHE; and secondly the *policy agendas* that influence schools' approaches.

Looking first to views on the *purpose* of PSHE, in our study the primary case study schools tended to emphasise, firstly, the all-encompassing value of PSHE in developing the whole child, which they saw as one of the core purposes of primary schooling. This was related to personal development, particularly supporting emotional development and coping with emotions, and social development, in particular building, managing and maintaining relationships.

In addition, primary schools were frequently able to articulate another key purpose of PSHE: underpinning learning. So, for example, five of the primary schools highlighted the importance of PSHE in helping the staff and pupils model and manage behaviour and in two cases, attendance. In addition, at least four schools made clear connections between PSHE and developing learning and standards.

Secondary case study schools' views of purposes of PSHE can be set in contrast here. They tended not to concentrate on personal development, with just one seeing PSHE as being about self-understanding, but all saw the main purpose of PSHE as helping young people to deal with life issues.   This emphasis meant that schools often linked the purpose to specific local issues including gang violence and knife crime, and others emphasised developing pupils as good citizens. However, interestingly, in no secondary schools was PSHE clearly seen as directly underpinning academic performance.

Related to these differing views of the purpose of PSHE is the second key issue linked to the lack of status in secondary schools: *policy drivers*. Well over a decade ago Murray (1998, p. 28) noted that what was then known as PSE was '*fairly loosely applied to describe a variety of school arrangements for the social and personal development of pupils*' and '*consequently, the status of PSE and commitment to it as part of a wider educational mission varies from school to school*'. At that time, there were few policy initiatives in place to support PSE, and it was struggling to find its place in relation to the National Curriculum. However, under the Blair and Brown administrations, PSHE appeared better aligned with the education policies of the New Labour years, linking to the Every Child Matters, SEAL and Healthy Schools agendas in relation to personal wellbeing, and a raft of other agendas (14-19 and diplomas; STEM; enterprise education; Connexions; and so on) in relation to the

newer 'economic wellbeing' aspects. With two Ofsted reviews, a broader set of Ofsted inspection indicators, a QCA curriculum and - crucially - an expected new Children, Schools and Families Bill making PSHE a statutory element of the curriculum, one might have expected PSHE to be clearly supported in all sectors. Yet, as we note above, this was not the case. There appear to be a number of reasons for this.

Firstly, whilst the Every Child Matters (ECM) and associated agendas had high profile and support at national government level, they more closely fitted the core purposes of primary schools: these agendas were never afforded the same status in secondary schools, since they were seen to be more relevant to the earlier phases of education, focused, as they were, on child development rather than preparation for further study and work.

Secondly, in any case, the ECM and associated agendas around what might now in current policy parlance be called 'wellbeing' were always subordinate to the over-riding 'standards' agenda. This can be seen as being part of a wider political tension at the heart of the New Labour project, identified by Hall (2003) who argues that New Labour governance assumed an essentially neo-liberal strategy with some social democratic concessions in order to maintain its core working class and public sector support. He likens this uncomfortable coexistence to a 'double shuffle' but with the neoliberal imperative always the dominate force.

Finally, and returning to the purposes of PSHE, although the standards agenda is just as powerful in primary as in secondary schools, many primary schools saw the value of PSHE in underpinning learning and therefore standards, helped by the clear links in many primaries between PSHE and SEAL.

These differences in relation to valuing the purposes of PSHE and seeing PSHE as contributing to supporting learning were played out in various ways. Contrast, for example, the following two schools.

Case 1: A secondary school

An over-subscribed, high performing girl's school in a very affluent almost exclusively white area with an outstanding Ofsted grade and a very small percentage of Special Educational Needs (SEN) or Free School Meals (FSM) pupils. The whole school placed a very strong emphasis on academic performance.

PSHE had low status within the school: it was not being assessed, it was not included in school reports, and was jointly timetabled with Citizenship. Due to timetabling constraints, some form groups often had a different teacher for each PHSE lesson, representing poor continuity of provision.

Although the Head Teacher and Senior Leadership Team recognised PSHE shortcomings, describing current provision as fragmented and disorganised, they demonstrated limited determination to address this. Indeed one scheduled intervention was to introduce more drop down days, with PSHE delivered by outside experts; despite this being widely discredited in the literature due to their 'one-off' nature. However, the Head Teacher and Senior Leadership Team seemed unaware about the depth of hostility felt towards PSHE from both students and staff.

Staff felt unskilled and unsupported to deliver PSHE in a prevailing context where the

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school was ultimately judged on assessed subjects such as English, Science and Maths. As a result teachers, other staff and pupils largely viewed spending time and energy on PHSE as an ultimately pointless exercise.

'It's a very important subject to me, but never valued the same by pupils or other staff because it's not examined. The minute it's not examined, they don't put the same amount in; they may enjoy it but it may come low on their list of priorities… PSHE doesn't feature in the league tables as it is not assessed or examined. The priority for PSHE is not so high for the Head if it's not statutory'. (S1, PSHE lead)

Case 2: A primary school

An inner city primary school located in an area characterised by significant social deprivation. The lead teacher claimed the overarching purpose of PSHE at the school was to build '*pupils' self-esteem*' and to enable them to work with others in order to become '*more active learners*'. Using PSHE as a vehicle for improving self-esteem in order to develop their '*tolerance*' and '*empathy*' was something that the Senior Leadership Team saw as crucial, given that these particular skills may not be being exhibited regularly within pupils' home environments. Although the Head teacher asserted the '*standards agenda is very high on our list of priorities*' (in response to Ofsted's clear focus on the poor academic standards at the school), it was evident that the school believed that thorough engagement and investment in PSHE was the most effective mechanism of improving standards: '*I feel that PSHE is the means to drive the standards up*' (Head teacher).

This sentiment was echoed by the Deputy head and teachers, who felt that without addressing the often complex personal and social problems pupils at the school were experiencing at home, there was no chance of increasing standards. The school genuinely sees PSHE as being a key driver for improved learning and academic outputs as well as a means of enhancing emotional literacy:

'*A lot of the children in this school have emotional issues and through the PSHE curriculum we can support those; and unless they have got the social and emotional skills then that is going to inhibit their learning skills. We see it as key to learning and it underpins everything else we do*' (Deputy head)

In Case 1, senior leaders in the school do not place great value on PSHE, treating its aims as outside the mainstream work - academic results - of the school, and this view is shared by many teachers and pupils. In Case 2, there is still a strong emphasis on academic standards, yet the Head teacher and other staff spoken with were able to mesh the child/personal development aspects with support for learning. This did not mean that all issues were dealt with - far from it, since as with other primary schools this one largely equated PSHE with SEAL, and therefore some aspects, notably SRE and personal finance, were not well delivered. Nevertheless, the contrast in status between the two schools is particularly notable and reflects many of the key differences in status between primary and secondary schools.

Conclusion - valuing PSHE in new times

PSHE has experienced a tumultuous recent history, which, as has been outlined elsewhere (Brown et al, 2011), indicates that the current Coalition government is at least tacitly sending out a message that it does not value PSHE to the same extent as other curriculum subjects. Brown et al (2011), claim that the '*withdrawal of funding* (for CPD), *alongside the change of policy towards the statutory status of PSHE, perhaps sends a signal about the devaluing of PSHE to teaching staff*' (Brown et al 2011, p.118). The current paper's argument thus far has been that, firstly, perceptions of PSHE effectiveness is variable across schools and PSHE elements and, secondly, one key issue is the variable status of PSHE which is in turn linked to its perceived purpose and how this is aligned to each school's vision of its purpose more broadly. In this concluding section we turn to the future: how, in the current

climate, can the status of PSHE be raised in schools to promote and support effective teaching and planning?

We have argued in this paper that one reason why the status of PSHE is typically higher in primary schools is that PSHE – partly due to its close links to SEAL – is seen to support effective teaching and learning, as well as developing important life skills. One response, therefore, is for advocates of PSHE to redouble their efforts to show how PSHE can support teaching and learning across the curriculum. There are a number of avenues to explore here. Most importantly – and this is far from a new concern – unearth evidence of the impacts of effective PSHE on the wider curriculum and, where it does not exist, to gather such evidence. There are some useful starting points here, for example John Lloyd's review of evidence for the impact of PSHE (Lloyd, 2011) and Hale et al's (2011) model for delivering evidence based PSHE in secondary schools. However much still needs to be done. Related to this is the need to emphasise the importance of genuinely consulting pupils and parents on their views, as part of their evaluation of PSHE. Evaluation necessarily involves addressing the difficulties many teachers find in relation to assessing the effectiveness of PSHE (Formby et al, 2011 chapter 7, not to mention the difficulties and in fact differing opinions on the value of assessment (ibid chapter 6).

Clearly linked to the need to establish appropriate evaluation, a second area for exploration is to develop arguments that relate PSHE to established learning theories more explicitly than has been to done to date. This is the work of a separate paper but there are obvious possibilities in relation to constructivist theories. For example, PSHE education's role in helping children build and manage relationships can be linked to Vygotsky's (1978) arguments that learning is a social process reliant on interactions between children, and between children and adults. There are also

perhaps even clearer potential links to be made with humanist theories. Formby and Wolstenholme (2012) outlined the relationship to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (1943), and one can also see potential in Rogers' (1983) facilitative learning theory.

Evidently a growing evidence base and greater consideration of explicitly relating PSHE to established learning theories would make it easier to make a more compelling case for the current government to renew their commitment towards PSHE; particularly given the subject's clear potential to contribute towards its flagship 'Big Society' agenda. The Conservative Manifesto (2010) outlines a desire for '*Big Government*' to be replaced by '*Big Society*' their vision for which is:

> ' …*to be a society, with much higher levels of personal, professional, civic and corporate responsibility; a society where people come together to solve problems and improve life for themselves and their communities; a society where the leading force for progress is social responsibility, not state control.*'
> (p37)

Indeed, considering the high level of congruence between what PSHE covers (relationship building, wellbeing, civic participation, healthy lifestyles and employment to name but some) and the aims surrounding 'Big Society' it is difficult to understand why PSHE is not already more explicitly aligned to the 'Big Society'. There is clearly the potential for good quality PSHE in combination with SEAL and Citizenship to be at the forefront of teaching pupils the skills and values to meaningfully contribute to the lofty aims of the 'Big Society' (Rowe et al, 2011).

However, all of these avenues for raising status require advocates whose voices are disappearing, and those who are left struggle to make their voices heard in a world where local authorities are becoming increasingly marginalised, schools are

becoming increasingly independent and of course PSHE is now very unlikely to be made statutory. Where they remain, local authority leads for PSHE will no doubt continue to incorporate PSHE focused training into their provision and assist to disseminate good practice through local school networks. Where they are disappearing this leaves a significant vacuum in the provision of good quality PSHE CPD, resources and effective signposting, although organisations such as the PSHE Association remain and become increasingly vital.

In the new education landscape, Teaching Schools are intended to assume a key responsibility for supporting and assuring ITT, professional development and leadership for teachers and leaders in their area. Unfortunately the initial signs are not promising in relation to PSHE. The National College of School Leadership (NCSL) and the Training Agency recently revealed which of the first cohort of just under 300 Teaching Schools would lead on a variety of 'areas of expertise'. A total of 45 different areas of expertise were identified ranging from CPD to specific subjects such as Maths to performance management. Tellingly, PSHE was not represented by a single school.

A second potential opening might arise through the proposed creation of health and wellbeing boards which are intended to have a more devolved responsibility (HM Government, 2011). This shift in public health responsibility from NHS to local authority ostensibly represents potentially fertile opportunities for cultivating more meaningful links between schools/education professionals, Directors of Children's Services and 'traditional' health professionals.

To sum up, there is a growing knowledge base - to which this paper attempts to contribute - on what makes effective PSHE and its importance to the educational and

social lives of children and young people. The vital concern for all of those that are committed to PSHE, as this brief conclusion indicates, is how to ensure this knowledge can continue to inform improved PSHE practice.

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Attachments

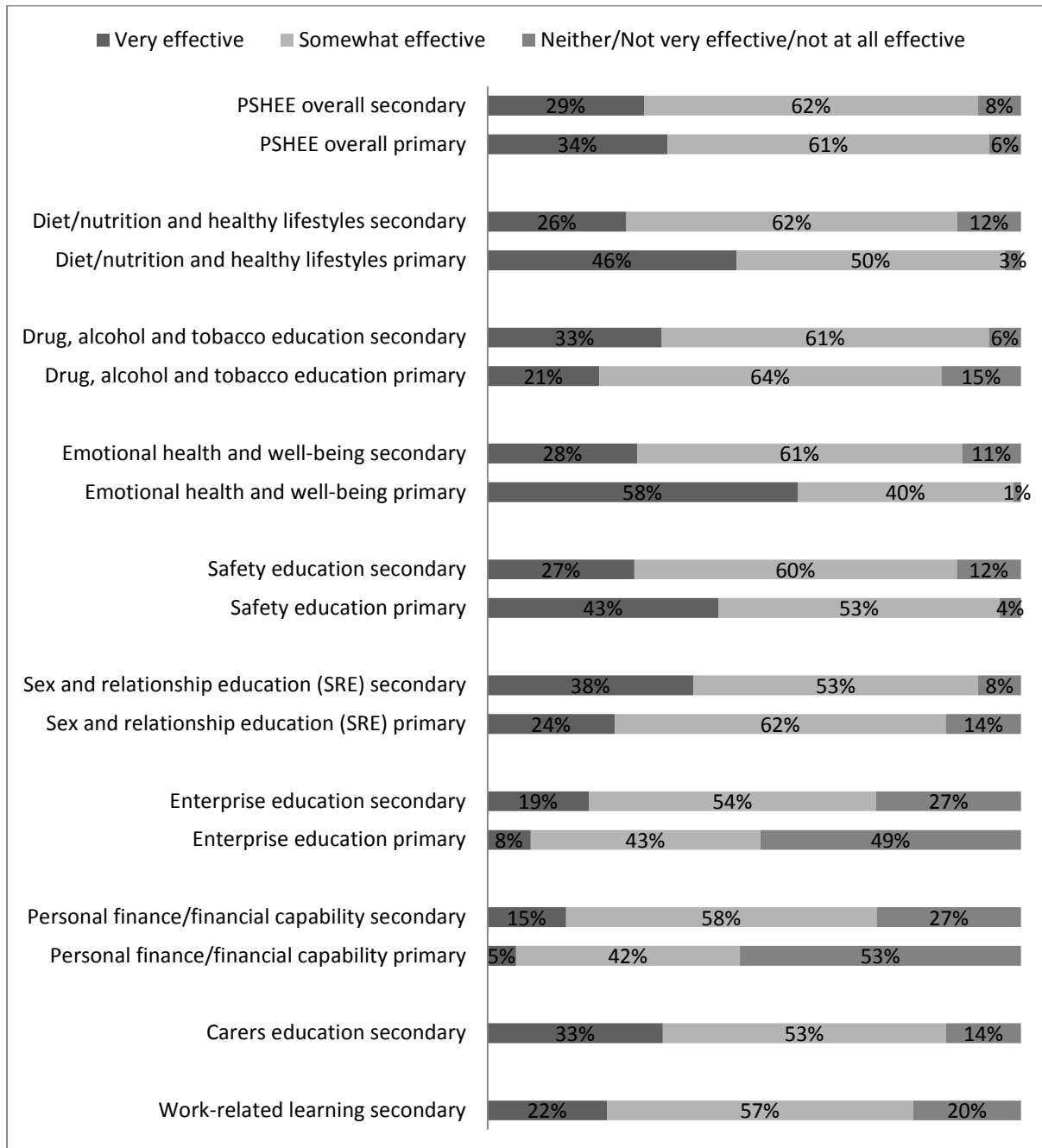**Figure 1: Perceptions of effectiveness of PSHE elements in primary and secondary schools**

Legend: ■ Very effective ■ Somewhat effective ■ Neither/Not very effective/not at all effective

Category	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Neither/Not very effective/not at all effective
PSHEE overall secondary	29%	62%	8%
PSHEE overall primary	34%	61%	6%
Diet/nutrition and healthy lifestyles secondary	26%	62%	12%
Diet/nutrition and healthy lifestyles primary	46%	50%	3%
Drug, alcohol and tobacco education secondary	33%	61%	6%
Drug, alcohol and tobacco education primary	21%	64%	15%
Emotional health and well-being secondary	28%	61%	11%
Emotional health and well-being primary	58%	40%	1%
Safety education secondary	27%	60%	12%
Safety education primary	43%	53%	4%
Sex and relationship education (SRE) secondary	38%	53%	8%
Sex and relationship education (SRE) primary	24%	62%	14%
Enterprise education secondary	19%	54%	27%
Enterprise education primary	8%	43%	49%
Personal finance/financial capability secondary	15%	58%	27%
Personal finance/financial capability primary	5%	42%	53%
Carers education secondary	33%	53%	14%
Work-related learning secondary	22%	57%	20%

Table 1: factors associated with perceived effective PSHE education (primary)

Factors	Increased effectiveness
All seven elements were delivered	2 times as effective
Staff were aware of CPD opportunities	1.9 times as effective
PSHE education evaluation included pupil consultation	1.9 times as effective
PSHE education was discussed at parents' evenings	1.75 times as effective
The PSHE education coordinator was paid and given time for the role	1.7 times as effective
PSHE education was included in the school assessment policy	1.6 times as effective
Pupil progress records were used for assessment	1.5 times as effective

Table 2: factors associated with perceived effective PSHE education (secondary)

Factors	Increased effectiveness
PSHE education was delivered by the PSHE education coordinator	2.6 times as effective
Discrete PSHE education lessons were used	2 times as effective
PSHE education evaluation included consultation with parents/carers and external agencies	1.9 times as effective
Pupil progress records were used for assessment	1.8 times as effective

* in addition, girls' schools were 2.3 times as likely to deliver (perceived) effective PSHE compared with others

APPENDIX potential influences on PSHE education effectiveness included in statistical models

1. Delivery of discrete PSHE education:
   - using PSHE education lessons or other approaches
   - frequency of PSHE education delivery
   - teaching methods adopted
   - who teaches PSHE education

2. Assessment in PSHE education:
   - types of assessments used
   - use of QCDA end of Key Stage statements
   - visibility of PSHE education assessments (whether referred to in school assessment plan / policy; whether mentioned in reports; whether discussed at parents' evenings)

3. PSHE education qualifications and CPD training
   - PSHE education qualifications of staff
   - CPD training - awareness and ease of access

4. PSHE education coordination and leadership
   - whether PSHE education coordination is resourced (time and money)
   - whether PSHE education is supported by SLT and/or school governor
   - whether PSHE education is present in school policy

5. PSHE education evaluation
   - whether PSHE education is evaluated through consultation (e.g. with pupils)

6. Estimate of resourcing
   - estimated spend on PSHE education per pupil

7. Healthy School status
   - whether the school has national Healthy School status and/or is participating in the Healthy Schools enhancement model

8. External / contextual
   - Faith status
   - Eligibility for FSM
   - School capacity
   - GOR
   - Type of school
   - Admissions policy