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Edward Timpson

Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families

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Councillor Bill Hartnett
Leader, Redditch Borough Council
Town Hall, Walter Stranz Square
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May 2017

Dear Councillor Hartnett,

Thank you for your letter of 13 April, addressed to the Secretary of State, about Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education. I am replying as the minister responsible for this policy area.

I was very interested to read the review by undertaken by Redditch Task Group, to inform and improve mental health services for your people in Redditch. The mental health of young people is a priority for this department. It wants all children to fulfil their potential. Tackling mental health problems will play a key role in enabling future generations to develop into resilient and confident adults. Improving it starts with ensuring that children and young people get the help and support they need and deserve.

The department wants to provide all young people with a curriculum that ensures they are prepared for adult life in modern Britain. Both relationships and sex education (RSE) and PSHE can help provide pupils with the key knowledge and skills to ensure that they can keep themselves safe, develop healthy and positive relationships, maintain good mental health, build resilience, manage their finances, prepare for the workplace, and successfully navigate the changing world in which they are growing up.

As you will be aware, new clauses to the Children and Social Work Bill have been introduced, to provide for regulations to require all secondary schools in England, including maintained schools, academies and independent schools, to teach RSE. The focus in primary school will be on building healthy relationships and staying safe. As children get older and move on to secondary school, it is important that they start to develop their understanding of healthy adult relationships in more depth, with sex education delivered in that context. Parents will retain the right to withdraw their child from sex education.

Schools and colleges have an important role to play in educating children and young people about mental health. The department wants to encourage them to develop their PSHE programmes to reflect the needs of their students. It has, therefore, provided resources from expert organisations, to help students understand the issues relating to mental health.

The department has funded the PSHE Association to provide mental health guidance and lesson plans, which support age-appropriate teaching about mental illnesses, including promoting emotional wellbeing and healthy coping strategies. Further details are available on the PSHE Association's website at: www.pshe-association.org.uk.

Yours ever,
Edward.

Edward Timpson
Minister of State for Vulnerable Children and Families