

## **Attitudes of parents and carers towards sexuality and relationships education in schools**

### **Executive summary and conclusions**

#### **Attitudes towards sexuality and relationships education (SRE)**

- The overwhelming majority of parents (98%) agree that young people need to be provided with information about sexual decision making before they engage in sexual relationships.
- For many parents, the topic of sexuality can be a difficult one to discuss and 9 in 10 parents (90%) feel that receiving information about sexuality and relationships would encourage them to discuss the topic with their school-age children.
- Further, 72% of parents feel that it would actually be easier for them to communicate with their child about sexuality and relationships if the child received this education at school. This is particularly so for parents who speak a language other than English at home (93% agree).
- There is a strong belief amongst parents (83% agree) that children who are provided with sexuality and relationships education at school are more likely to practice safe sex when they are older.
- The above findings indicate a strong acceptance of the need to educate children about sexuality and relationships. The question now is where should this education come from? From parents or the school system?
- For 85% of parents in Cairns and on the Sunshine Coast, the answer is a shared responsibility between parents and teachers. Just 15% feel the responsibility lies with parents.
- There are no differences in attitude between parents who live in Cairns and parents who live on the Sunshine Coast. Likewise, mothers and fathers share the same views, as do parents who speak a language other than English at home and those who do not. Further, in terms of the above statements, there are no statistically significant differences in parental attitudes between parents who identify as Anglican, Catholic or 'Other Christian' and those who do not identify with any religion.

#### **Delivery of SRE in schools**

- 91% of parents are in favour of teachers delivering sexuality and relationships education in schools. In fact, 79% of parents would be concerned if SRE was not offered. Those who identify as Catholic, 'Other Christian' or Anglican are equally supportive of SRE in schools, as are those who do not identify with any religion.

- Those who are in favour of delivery of SRE by teachers believe that teachers are more likely to deliver the education in a consistent and thorough manner.
- Just 6% of parents are opposed to teachers delivering SRE in schools and the remaining 3% of parents are undecided.
- Many of those who are against teachers delivering sexuality and relationships education are not necessarily opposed to the education itself, they are opposed to it being delivered by teachers who are not qualified to teach the subject. Others, as stated earlier, feel the responsibility for educating children sits with the parents.

### **When should SRE be introduced?**

- Sexuality and relationships education comprises many topics. Some of these topics are considered to be more suitable for students in early education (from kindergarten to Grade 3), others are felt to be appropriate for those in high school.
- Approximately 7 in 10 parents (68%) feel that students in early education should learn about feelings; learning about sexual development can be introduced in Grades 4 to 7, as can reproductive health.
- Opinions surrounding the introduction of 'preventing sexual abuse' are polarised, with 46% feeling that this topic should be introduced in early education and 41% stating that it should be delayed until Grades 4 to 7.
- Preventing sexual abuse is considered the most important component of sexuality and relationships education (93% of parents rate this extremely or very important). This is followed by sexual development at 75% (being introduced in Grades 4 to 7).

### **Current and desired level of SRE**

- One third of parents with a child in Grade 6 are aware that their child currently receives sexuality and relationships education at school. Of these parents, 59% are happy with the amount of SRE they receive at school; 26% would like their child to receive more SRE and just 4% would like their child to receive less SRE at school.
- Just under half of parents with a child in Grade 6 state that their child does not receive SRE at school. Of these, half (50%) would like their child to receive more SRE.

### **Implementing SRE in schools**

- Successful implementation of SRE in schools, from parental perspectives, will rely upon:
  - The education being age appropriate (82% extremely/very important)
  - Children being given ongoing lessons over several years (80% extremely/very important)
  - Teachers having access to professional development in SRE (75% extremely/very important)
  - Involving parents and carers (71% extremely/very important)