

Relationships and Sex Education: Briefing for Peers

Motion to approve: Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (England) Regulations 2019 (Lord Agnew of Oulton) **24 March 2019**

The draft guidance was debated in the House of Commons on 20 March 2019, followed by a vote (27 March 2019) with the outcome: **538 AYES and 21 NOES.**

This briefing is produced by the Sex Education Forum, which is a group of partners including local authorities and national charities working together to secure young people's entitlement to good quality RSE. The Sex Education Forum is hosted at the National Children's Bureau and has been shaping policy and practice on RSE for over 30 years.

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Summary points

- **With substantial cross-party support, the Government took the bold and necessary step, through the Children and Social Work Act 2017, of requiring all schools to provide Relationships Education in primary, and Relationships and Sex Education in secondary. The laying of updated guidance and regulations will help make this happen in practice. Regular updates to the guidance will be important to ensure it reflects evidence and meets children's needs.**
- **The majority of parents want schools to teach RSE (92% in a 2016 independent poll, PSHE Association). Effective RSE is a partnership between parents and schools. Parental involvement is integral to the new RSE guidance.**
- **Education, not ignorance is the only way that children will be able to recognise abusive behaviour and know how to seek help. 1 in 20 children are sexually abused and 1 in 3 did not tell an adult (Radford, 2011). Sexual abuse can happen to any child, so the only way to safeguard children is to ensure Relationships Education has no opt out.**
- **Bullying and poor mental health affects LGBT young people at alarming rates. Nearly half of LGBT pupils (45 per cent) – are bullied for being LGBT at school (Stonewall, 2017). Schools are already required to teach in a way that does not discriminate on protected characteristics, so a LGBT inclusive approach to RSE is nothing new.**
- **Schools can choose the resources they use to teach RSE, and can choose to include faith perspectives alongside essential information about the law, legal rights and medical facts.**
- **Teachers need training in RSE so that schools can offer the high quality provision. 80% of parents want teachers to have training in RSE (Sex Education Forum, 2018).**

1. What is covered in Relationships Education?

Relationships education in primary schools will protect children. The proposals are to cover ‘Families and people who care for me’, ‘Caring friendships’, ‘Respectful relationships’, ‘Online relationships’, ‘Being safe’.

There is widespread agreement that children need to be able to recognise abusive behaviour and to know how to seek help if they are worried about abuse or experience it. The new guidance states that by the end of primary school all children should know: ‘how to report concerns or abuse, and the vocabulary and confidence needed to do so’.

The Sex Education Forum believes that Relationships Education should promote equal, safe and enjoyable relationships and be taught in a way which fosters LGBT and gender equality, in line with the Equalities Act 2010. The new guidance is compatible with this.

2. What is covered in sex education?

In the new guidance DfE continues to recommend that all primary schools ‘have a sex education programme tailored to the age and the physical and emotional maturity of the pupils. Schools are to determine the content of sex education at primary school. Sex education ‘should ensure that both boys and girls are prepared for the changes that adolescence brings and – drawing on knowledge of the human life cycle set out in the national curriculum for science - how a baby is conceived and born’.

Health Education will be mandatory in all primary schools in England (except Independent Schools who have separate requirements on PSHE education as per the Independent Schools Standard) from September 2020. Health Education includes a section for primary and secondary schools on puberty, the changing adolescent body, menstrual wellbeing and the menstrual cycle.

Relationships Education, Health Education, science and sex education work together to protect children by ensuring they have knowledge of their bodies, the human life-cycle, emotions, acceptable behaviour and right and wrong.

3. Why does RSE need to be updated?

Children and young people, Head teachers, Ofsted and MPs across all major parties have called for RSE to be updated because currently provision is very patchy:

- 45% of young people rate the quality of their RSE as ‘good’ or ‘very good’
- 17% of all young people rate the quality of their RSE as ‘bad’ or ‘very bad’
- 23% of young people had not learnt how to tell if a relationship is healthy
(Independent poll of 1000 young people aged 16 and 17, Sex Education Forum, 2018)

Concerns about access to unreliable information online has highlighted the urgency of providing education at school:

- 28% of 11-12 year olds report seeing pornography (NSPCC, 2017)
“porn really opened my eyes - I have never been taught sex ed. in school so it was kind of up to me to find out all about it.” (Male, age 15, in NSPCC, 2017)

Young people say that school is their preferred main source of information about sex, followed by parents, then health professionals. Media and pornography are not preferred sources of information for very many young people at all (Tanton 2015).

4. What does the new guidance say about parental involvement?

Parents will retain the right to withdraw their child from sex education at primary and secondary school. A change brought in by the new guidance is that young people can opt into sex education from 3 terms before their 16th birthday. Parents will not have the option to withdraw their children from Relationships Education or Health Education.

Involving parents is integral to the new guidance. Paragraph 41 states that ‘Schools should ensure that parents know what will be taught and when, and clearly communicate the fact that parents have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of sex education delivered as part of statutory RSE.’ Schools are advised to keep a record of the process of dialogue with parents relating to requests to withdraw from sex education.

The guidance provides a reminder that ‘many schools build a good relationship with parents on these subjects over time – for example by inviting parents into school to discuss what will be taught, address any concerns and help support parents in managing conversations with their children on these issues’.

5. Do parents want schools to teach RSE?

Most parents are very supportive of schools providing relationships and sex education, and also want to play a part in educating their children at home.

- **78%** of parents want primary schools to teach their children about the difference between safe and unwanted touch and how to speak up if someone treats them inappropriately, 11% did not want primary schools to teach this and 11% ‘did not know’ (Independent poll of 1000 parents, Sex Education Forum, 2014).
- **72%** of parents think primary schools should teach children about what to do if they find pictures showing private parts of the body online or are asked to send them. (Independent poll of 1000 parents, Sex Education Forum, 2014).
- **92%** of parents support the teaching of PSHE education (which includes lessons about staying safe from abuse) in all schools (YouGov poll, PSHE Association, 2016)

Young people say that school is their preferred first choice for RSE, followed by their parents, but currently many parents are falling short in providing RSE at home:

- For boys, the main source of sex education while growing up is school (39%), followed by friends (24%), with fathers accounting for 3% and mothers 4%.

Effective RSE is a partnership between parents and schools. Parents need to be given adequate information about what is taught and when. School-home communication about RSE should start early so that parents can anticipate topics covered at school and make their own timely input or follow up at home. And parents have just as much right to expect good quality teaching in RSE as in other subjects.

80% of parents think RSE teachers should be trained to teach it (Independent poll of 1000 parents, Sex Education Forum, 2018).

To fully meet the needs of children and young people there is a need for proactive support for parents and carers to have an active role in providing RSE at home, and improved and ongoing home-school RSE communication can make an important contribution to this.

6. What RSE resources are being used in schools?

Schools have the flexibility to choose what resources they use. When teachers have adequate subject knowledge in RSE they are able to recognise factually, and medically correct information, and to use a range of resources skilfully to support discussion and challenge discrimination.

There are many ways to teach children about topics such as sexual abuse, which are neither frightening nor graphic. It is important that children have the words to describe the human body and the knowledge that certain behaviour, such as inappropriate touching, is wrong.

There is choice about the resources that can be used to support this learning. For example:

- Story books that teach that ‘some secrets should never be kept’,
- NPSCC’s ‘Pants’ resource for parents, early years settings and primary schools
- Activities such as drawing body outlines for children to label and learn correct terms for genitalia, and that they are private.

7. Does RSE damage children?

No, the reverse is true:

- A large study in United States found young people who had received RSE were less likely to describe first sex as unwanted, and female respondents who had received RSE were less likely to have a partner with a big age difference (Lindberg, 2012).
- Young people citing school as their main source of information about sex are less likely to contract an STI or (for young women) to be pregnant by 18 or experience an unplanned pregnancy in later life (Tanton 2015)
- Young people who have had high quality RSE are more likely to start having sex at an older age and more likely to use condoms and contraception if they do have sex (Kirby 2007 and UNESCO 2018)

8. What about LGBT issues and RSE?

It is a requirement of the Equality Act 2010 that the curriculum is taught in an inclusive way that does not discriminate. An increasing number of schools are teaching about LGBT issues (Stonewall, 2017). However, the poor mental health of LGBT people remains alarmingly high:

- Nearly half of lesbian, gay, bi and trans pupils (45 per cent) – are bullied for being LGBT at school. This compares with 65 per cent in 2007 (Stonewall, 2017)
- Nearly one in ten trans pupils (nine per cent) are subjected to death threats at school (Stonewall, 2017)

- One in eight LGBT people aged 18-24 (13 per cent) said they've attempted to take their own life in the last year (Stonewall / YouGov 2018)

LGBT inclusion in RSE helps tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. It does not encourage any particular lifestyle. In primary school, when learning about families and 'how they care for us', children learn about the diverse range of families, so it is easy to include families with same-sex parents. Challenging gender stereotypes is important throughout primary and secondary school, and contributes to tackling sexual harassment and sexual violence in schools and in society.

There are lots of resources that schools can choose from to ensure their teaching about relationships is inclusive and clear about equality.

9. Are faith perspectives included in RSE?

Faith perspectives can be included in RSE alongside information about the law and medical facts. It is important that different types of information are identified as such, i.e. description of a faith position or belief, or legal or medical facts. There are lots of faith schools already providing high quality and inclusive RSE.

- The Catholic Education Service [model RSE programme for primary school](#) includes factual information about the human body, e.g. 'The names of the main parts of the body, including identifying and correctly naming genitalia (e.g. penis and vagina)' and clearly identifies a separate section: 'Religious understanding of human relationships'
- **Cardinal Newman Catholic Secondary School, Luton** – teachers have been trained on gender and sexual orientation in order to tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, and so that teachers are equipped to respond to students' questions in the PSHE curriculum. A school ethos group supported this initiative and the school is proud to be welcoming to all in their community.
<https://vimeo.com/313182508>

A schools' RSE policy is a good place to explain how their RSE programme contributes to the ethos and values of the school. The importance of respectful behaviour and positive, caring relationships is integral to the ethos and values of perhaps every school in the country.

10. Do teachers have adequate training to teach high-quality RSE?

A survey of teachers of RSE in 2018 found that:

- 29% had never had any training in RSE
- 76% said it would be 'very useful' or to have further practical advice on how to deliver RSE to students with Special Education Needs and Disabilities (SEND)
- 70% said it would 'very useful' to have guidance on how to choose and use reliable resources
- 64% said it would be 'very useful' to have information on how to involve parents when developing your RSE curriculum

Parents and pupils alike should expect RSE to be taught to a high standard, just like any other subject on the curriculum. This is backed up by UNESCO (2018) international guidelines that teachers responsible for the delivery of RSE require training on the specific skills needed to address sexuality accurately and clearly.

Government has announced investment of £6m to support implementation of the new subjects. This is unlikely to be enough for a teacher in every school to access high quality training. There is currently no detail about how the spend will be split between the new subjects. Teachers have highlighted aspects of RSE as particularly challenging to deliver without training. Implementation of high quality RSE is heavily dependent on the quality of implementation support.

11. Once the guidance is laid what other support is needed?

Ongoing monitoring and evaluation will be needed to ensure that:

- The training available is high quality and reaches all schools, not just those keen to be ‘early adopters’
- Ofsted comment on the quality of RSE during inspection, and that this dovetails within the new framework for inspection
- RSE is accessible to pupils with SEND in mainstream and special schools
- That dialogue between schools and parents relating to withdrawal from RSE are documented and that Government keeps under review how children’s entitlement is met
- That the standard of RSE provided in all types of schools in England is indeed improving
- That the RSE guidance is updated regularly, for example every 3 years

12. Does every child need RSE at school?

Yes, absolutely. Sexual abuse can happen to any child. Statistics show that abusers are usually known to a child and often within their family. This is one reason why it’s of fundamental importance that every child receives relationships education.

What if we fail to teach RSE.....?

“I was sexually abused and no one told me what was done to me was wrong. We got stranger danger and how to cross the road and that was it. He was my granddad. I didn’t like it but didn’t know it was wrong but thought I should be embarrassed as I thought it was my fault. If I had known it was wrong and that I could say something and someone had listened, it might have stopped earlier than it did if I had known more or I might have told before I did.” (Female, 16 years old, respondent to Sex Education Forum ‘Heads or Tails’ survey, 2016)

““We weren’t taught about what sex is so how would we know if we were assaulted or raped” (Young person aged 16 or 17, respondent to Independent poll, 2018, Sex Education Forum)

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See also (below) [12 principles for RSE](#), supported by NSPCC, Barnardo's, The Children's Society and NCB

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We are committed to relationships and sex education, which:

- 1.** Is an identifiable part of a personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education curriculum, which has planned, timetabled lessons across all the Key Stages
- 2.** Is taught by staff regularly trained in RSE and PSHE (with expert visitors invited in to enhance and supplement the programme where appropriate)
- 3.** Works in partnership with parents and carers, informing them about what their children will be learning and about how they can contribute at home
- 4.** Delivers lessons where pupils feel safe and encourages participation by using a variety of teaching approaches with opportunities to develop critical thinking and relationship skills
- 5.** Is based on reliable sources of information, including about the law and legal rights, and distinguishes between fact and opinion
- 6.** Promotes safe, equal, caring and enjoyable relationships and discusses real-life issues appropriate to the age and stage of pupils, including friendships, families, consent, relationship abuse, sexual exploitation and safe relationships online
- 7.** Gives a positive view of human sexuality, with honest and medically accurate information, so that pupils can learn about their bodies and sexual and reproductive health in ways that are appropriate to their age and maturity
- 8.** Gives pupils opportunities to reflect on values and influences (such as from peers, media, faith and culture) that may shape their attitudes to relationships and sex, and nurtures respect for different views
- 9.** Includes learning about how to get help and treatment from sources such as the school nurse and other health and advice services, including reliable information online
- 10.** Fosters gender equality and LGBT+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans) equality and challenges all forms of discrimination in RSE lessons and in every-day school life
- 11.** Meets the needs of all pupils with their diverse experiences - including those with special educational needs and disabilities
- 12.** Seeks pupils' views about RSE so that teaching can be made relevant to their real lives and assessed and adapted as their needs change

Notes
These 12 points explain what is needed for good quality RSE. This is based on research evidence and is supported by a wide range of organisations. The purpose of RSE is to help children and young people to be safe, healthy and happy as they grow up and in their future lives. RSE must always be appropriate to pupils' age and stage of development and is an essential part of safeguarding. The law requires that, from September 2019, relationships and sex education (RSE) is taught in all secondary schools in England, and that relationships education is taught in all primary schools in England. In addition, National Curriculum Science* (which is taught in maintained schools) includes some elements of sex education.