

Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Health Education in England

Summary of Department for Education (DfE) statutory guidance on what schools in England must and should deliver

June 2019

From 2020, Relationships Education will be compulsory in all primary schools in England and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) will be compulsory in all secondary schools. Health Education will be compulsory in all state funded schools. Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) continues to be compulsory in independent schools. This is in response to the identified risks children and young people may face through their increased online activities and the need to support them to be safe and healthy, and manage their academic, personal and social lives in a positive way.

Following a consultation with parents, young people and professionals the DfE has published statutory guidance for Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Health Education in England (DfE, 2019a).

This briefing summarises some of the key things that schools must and should implement from 2020. The DfE is encouraging schools to implement the new curriculum from September 2019.

Developing a policy

All schools must have in place a written policy for Relationships Education and RSE. This should take account of pupils' needs and the community they serve and schools should work closely with parents when planning and delivering these subjects.

Schools should refer to the DfE guidance, Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges (DfE, 2018).

Schools should ensure that Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education is accessible to all pupils and recognise that pupils with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) may be more vulnerable to exploitation, bullying and other issues due to the nature of their SEND.

At the point at which schools consider it appropriate to teach pupils about lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) issues, they should ensure that this is fully integrated into their programmes of study rather than delivered as a standalone unit:

“Pupils should be able to understand the world in which they are growing up, which means understanding that some people are LGBT, that this should be respected in British society, and that the law affords them and their relationships recognition and protections” (DfE, 2019b).

Right to be excused from sex education (the right to withdraw)

Parents will have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of sex education delivered as part of statutory RSE.

For SEND pupils, the head teacher may want to take a pupil’s specific needs into account when making decisions about whether a pupil may be excused.

Relationships Education in primary schools

The focus in primary school should be on teaching the fundamental building blocks and characteristics of positive relationships, with particular reference to friendships, family relationships, and relationships with other children and adults.

This will create opportunities to ensure children are taught about positive emotional and mental wellbeing and how friendships can impact on this.

Children will also be taught to recognise and report different types of abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual. This will include focusing on boundaries and privacy so that children understand that they have rights over their own bodies and know how to seek advice when they suspect or know something is wrong. There will also be opportunities to teach children about boundaries with their peers,

including when they are online, and ensuring they learn that where abuse takes place it is never the fault of the child who is abused.

Sex education in primary school

Sex education is not compulsory in primary schools although many primary schools already choose to teach some aspects of sex education and will continue to do so. Primary schools that choose to teach sex education should tailor teaching to take account of the age and the physical maturity of its pupils and must allow parents to withdraw their children where requested.

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in secondary schools

The aim of RSE is to give young people the information needed to develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not just intimate relationships. Effective RSE does not encourage early sexual experimentation but teaches young people to understand human sexuality and respect themselves and others.

Knowledge about safer sex and sexual health remains important to ensure young people can make safe, informed and healthy choices as they progress to adult life. Pupils should also be given opportunities to understand how healthy relationships can benefit their own mental wellbeing and self respect.

There should be opportunities for pupils to learn about the laws surrounding sex, sexuality, sexual health and gender identity which should be delivered in an age appropriate and inclusive way. The laws around a variety of other issues should be considered which include: marriage, consent, pornography, abortion, radicalisation and gangs.

There should also be opportunities to learn about grooming, sexual exploitation and domestic abuse which should include addressing coercive and controlling behaviour. The physical and emotional damage that can be caused by female genital mutilation (FGM) should also be addressed.

Schools should continue to work closely with parents when planning and delivering RSE. Parents will have the right to withdraw their child from the sex education element of RSE, except under exceptional circumstances, up to and until three terms before the child turns 16.

Physical health and mental wellbeing

The aim of teaching pupils about physical health and mental wellbeing is to give them information they need to make good decisions about their own health and wellbeing with a clear focus on reducing stigma attached to health issues.

Physical health and mental wellbeing in primary schools

In primary school the focus should be on teaching the characteristics of good physical health and mental wellbeing and the benefits of hobbies, interests and participation in their own communities. By embedding these principles teachers should be able to address issues such as isolation, loneliness, unhappiness, bullying and the negative impacts of poor health and wellbeing.

Physical health and mental wellbeing in secondary schools

Pupils should be taught to make well informed, positive choices for themselves that seek to support their own health and wellbeing. There should be opportunities for teaching pupils about problems and challenges, including more serious mental and physical health conditions such as substance and alcohol misuse, with a focus on providing information about effective interventions. Schools may also choose to teach about issues such as eating disorders.

Teachers should also demonstrate awareness of common adverse childhood experiences such as bereavement, family breakdown and exposure to domestic abuse, and how these might impact on pupils and influence how they experience these subjects.

Pupils should be taught how to judge when they or someone they know needs support and where they can seek help if needed.

Pupil Referral Units/alternative provision

Pupil Referral Units and providers of alternative provision will be required to make provision for Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education in the same way as mainstream schools. The particular needs and vulnerabilities of pupils should be considered when teaching these subjects.

Whole school approach

All of these subjects should be set in the context of a wider whole-school approach to supporting pupils to be safe, happy and prepared for life beyond school.

For example, the curriculum on relationships and sex should complement, and be supported by, the school's wider policies on behaviour, inclusion, respect for equality and diversity, bullying and safeguarding.

Safeguarding

At the heart of Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education, there is a focus on keeping children safe and the role that schools can play in preventative education.

Teachers should be aware of the risks in teaching about sensitive subjects such as self harm and suicide and give particular considerations to planning around these issues and ensuring material is focused on prevention rather than being instructional.

Good practice allows children an open forum to discuss potentially sensitive issues. This in turn can lead to an increase in children disclosing abuse, or of teachers becoming aware of concerns about a child's wellbeing. Teachers should all understand how to respond to disclosures of abuse and report any concerns they may have, following the school's safeguarding procedures.

Support for parents and carers

The DfE has produced guides for parents of primary and secondary aged children which can be used by schools to communicate how relationships and health education will be taught. The guides provide details of topics that will be covered and information of parent's rights to withdraw (DfE, 2019c).

References

Department for Education (DfE) (2018) Sexual violence and sexual harassment between children in schools and colleges.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/sexual-violence-and-sexual-harassment-between-children-in-schools-and-colleges> London: Department for Education.

Department for Education (DfE) (2019a) Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education: statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers.

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education->

[relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education](#) London: Department for Education.

Department for Education (DfE) (2019b) Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Health Education in England: government consultation response (PDF).

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/780768/Government_Response_to_RSE_Consultation.pdf

London: Department for Education.

Department for Education (DfE) (2019c) Relationships, sex and health education: guides for schools. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-sex-and-health-education-guides-for-schools> London: Department for Education.

Related NSPCC training

Our online and face to face courses can help teachers, school management teams and governors develop their understanding of how to protect children from abuse.

Safeguarding and child protection training courses – schools and education

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training/schools/>

Related NSPCC documents

We've created lesson plans to help teachers deliver lessons and start conversations about sex and relationships, online safety, bullying and staying safe from abuse.

Teaching resources and lesson plans

<https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/safeguarding-child-protection-schools/teaching-resources-lesson-plans/>

Contact the NSPCC's Knowledge and Information Service with any questions about child protection or related topics:

Tel: 0116 234 7246 | Email: learning@nspcc.org.uk | Twitter: [@NSPCCpro](https://twitter.com/NSPCCpro)

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