

Statutory Relationships Education/RSE

Information for schools

This document addresses concerns about the statutory RSE curriculum, clarifies the DfE's intentions and answers some frequently asked questions which you may be asked. The information is from the DfE's draft statutory guidance on relationships education and relationships and sex education (RSE), available in full on the DfE website.

What does the law say about teaching relationships education/RSE in the future?

From September 2020, all primary pupils must be taught relationships education, and secondary pupils must be taught relationships and sex education. This applies to every school.

Why is relationships education/RSE being made compulsory?

Because the DfE believes children and young people need to know how to be safe and healthy, and how to manage their academic, personal and social lives in a positive way. Most parents teach these skills at home, and the teaching in schools should build on what children learn from their parents.

In primary schools it is about healthy, respectful relationships, focusing on family and friendships. That means learning how to get along with others, take turns, and resolve disagreements, and how to know when a friendship isn't healthy and how to ask for help. It is not about sexual relationships.

At secondary, RSE will support pupils' personal and social development including personal identity, characteristics of positive relationships, emotional resilience and how to resist peer pressure. The sex education component will include teaching about intimate relationships, sex and sexual health.

Will my child have to learn about sex at school?

Sex education in primary schools will not be compulsory. Most primary schools already teach about puberty in a sensitive, age appropriate way. They do that so children understand the physical changes that they are going through or are about to go through. It is about growth and development, not sex. Teaching in this subject should meet the pupils' needs, as assessed during the development of the school's RSE policy. Parents should be consulted fully during the development of the policy so that they know exactly what their children will be taught.

Can parents withdraw their children from relationships education (primary) and relationships and sex education (RSE, secondary)?

Parents have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of sex education delivered as part of statutory RSE. Primary schools must agree to such requests. However, the right to withdraw does not apply to other aspects of Relationships Education, or to aspects of the science curriculum that deal with puberty and reproduction. There is no change to the science curriculum and there has never been a right to withdraw from science lessons.

In secondary, head teachers should discuss any request to withdraw a child from the sex education component of RSE. If parents still wish to withdraw their child after these discussions have taken place, the school should respect their wishes.

Can a young person make their own decision about attending sex education lessons?

If a child who has previously been withdrawn wishes to receive sex education, they can decide that for themselves in the last three terms before they turn 16 and the school should make arrangements to teach them sex education during one of those terms.

Will the school consult parents about the relationships education/RSE policy after the new subjects become statutory?

Yes. Schools must consult parents in developing and reviewing the policy. It should meet the needs of pupils and reflect the school's community. Schools should show parents what they are going to teach and the kind of resources they plan to use. This will be the parents' opportunity to have their say.

Will school respect the child's religion?

Yes, schools have to take into account the religious background of all pupils and handle sensitive topics appropriately. Faith is a protected characteristic under the Equalities Act and any curriculum development must therefore have due regard to that. People's beliefs will be respected. Schools must however still deliver the statutory curriculum to all pupils and have regard for the law as it relates to equality and discrimination. Where there appears to be conflict between religious beliefs and the statutory curriculum, schools can discuss different viewpoints with the children. It would be appropriate to teach that British society is diverse and everyone should be treated with respect, and at the same time that their family's religion teaches children a particular set of values that they believe in and live by. This should be done in an age appropriate way.

Will relationships education/RSE 'promote homosexuality'?

No, the aim of including relationships other than heterosexual marriage when looking at families is to promote inclusion and prevent bullying. School should be inclusive for all pupils, which means no child should be disrespected or socially excluded because their family is different to others. That includes but is not limited to those from families where someone is gay. This inclusive ethos should not conflict with religious beliefs that teach respect and tolerance. It will not involve teaching about intimate physical relationships at primary school.

What are we doing in Bradford to support schools with the introduction of RSE

Bradford Council is in active conversation with all faith communities as well as the LGBT community around this issue. The Council is developing a model RSE policy for schools, and communities are involved with the development of the policy. The model policy will be accompanied by guidance on consulting with parents about the teaching their children will receive in this subject.