

New compulsory 'relationships' subjects for every English school

Responding to the call for evidence

GUIDE TO TERMINOLOGY IN THE CALL FOR EVIDENCE

Relationships Education

A new compulsory subject for primary schools in England with **no parental right of withdrawal**. Separate to sex education, which still has a parental right of withdrawal.

Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)

Replacing sex education in secondary schools. There will be a parental right of withdrawal, though details are still to be confirmed.

The Government is asking for views on the new plans. They will be implemented for **all** state schools and independent schools in England from Sept 2019. Children as young as four will be taught about "different types of relationships". Our concern is that this could include homosexuality, transsexualism and same-sex marriage.

Please respond online at www.bit.ly/RSE-EVIDENCE

The deadline is 12 February 2018.

Answers can be up to **250 words per question**. A few questions are about you, but you can choose **not** to provide contact details. We have given some additional information to help you but **PLEASE USE YOUR OWN WORDS**.

There are four questions about Relationships Education and RSE, then three questions about Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE). You do not have to answer every question. This briefing does not cover PSHE, but please respond to those questions if you feel able.

BACKGROUND

In regulating all schools, the State must respect parents' beliefs. Parents are ultimately responsible for the education of their children, and the law recognises this.

The Government has said that Relationships Education will focus on "themes such as friendships, family relationships and dealing with strangers". But this area is a huge ideological battleground. Government ministers have indicated that LGBT issues will be covered. Labour have specifically called for LGBT teaching to be included within Relationships Education. It is clear from training delivered by the Sex Education Forum, a sex education lobby group,

that they think Relationships Education is equivalent to sex education. RSE in secondary schools would include teaching on "sex, sexual health and sexuality".

In modern Britain these subjects are highly contentious. Schools should respect this. This means limiting what they teach to non-controversial areas. Otherwise, they will inevitably cut across some parents' beliefs. Because of the potential sensitivity, parents should have the right to withdraw their children at all ages.

QUESTIONS

1 *Thinking about relationships education in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.*

POSSIBLE THEMES FOR YOUR RESPONSE:

- ▶ The relationships covered at this stage should be family, friends, teachers and those in authority. The Government must stick to its pledge not to cover intimate relationships until secondary school. Children in primary school are not ready to understand adult relationships.
- ▶ Being cautious of strangers, including online.
- ▶ Characteristics of good relationships, such as love, faithfulness, honesty, forgiveness, etc.
- ▶ Showing respect for those in authority or those who serve the community, such as nurses, firefighters, soldiers, doctors, etc.
- ▶ Knowing that all bullying is wrong no matter who the victim is.
- ▶ Respecting those holding different views. Being able to disagree well is crucial to a functioning democracy.
- ▶ Parents should have the right to withdraw their children.

2 *Thinking about relationships and sex education in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.*

POSSIBLE THEMES FOR YOUR RESPONSE:

- ▶ Respect for people who believe marriage is between a man and a woman, as well as respect more generally.
- ▶ Peer pressure is a significant issue. How can pupils be helped to stand on their own convictions and not just go along with the crowd, while still being respectful of others?
- ▶ The nature of marriage and its benefits to individuals and society (www.marriagefoundation.org.uk/research).
- ▶ Other themes could include:
 - The risks of promiscuity to physical and mental health;
 - The legal age of consent and the abuse of trust law (particularly older children).
- ▶ Parents should have the right to withdraw their children.

3 *We are particularly interested in understanding stakeholder views on Relationships Education and RSE which are specific to the digital context. Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, or as part of the computing curriculum?*

POSSIBLE THEMES FOR YOUR RESPONSE:

- ▶ Principles that apply to face-to-face relationships also apply online. Increased anonymity or distance can lead to people behaving in ways they would never behave in person. Pupils should learn that they should not do or say anything online that they would not do or say face-to-face.
- ▶ The danger of providing personal details, including images. Pupils should realise that anything they put online or share electronically could be made public.
- ▶ The importance of children and young people talking to parents about what they do or see online.

- ▶ The law on malicious communications and sexual images, e.g. 'sexting' is illegal for under-18s.
- ▶ Other themes could include: switching off/controlling time spent online; realising that people often present an idealised version of themselves; the damaging effects of viewing online pornography.
- ▶ There may be some contexts where teaching on this will be inappropriate, such as where the pupils do not have access to the internet. Schools must be sensitive to their context and work in partnership with parents.

4 *We are also interested in understanding more about how schools communicate with parents on Relationships Education and RSE and are able to make informed decisions that best meet the needs of their children. This includes a right to withdraw their child from sex education within the RSE subject but not from sex education in the national curriculum for science. How should schools effectively consult parents so they can make informed decisions that meet the needs of their child, including on the right to withdraw? For example, how often, on what issues and by what means?*

POSSIBLE THEMES FOR YOUR RESPONSE:

- ▶ Schools should engage positively with parents on all issues relating to Relationships Education and RSE and work in partnership with them. Parents should be consulted on relevant policies.
- ▶ Parents should have the chance to review materials before they are used. They could be made available online.
- ▶ Parental concerns are not just about explicit sexual content. They relate to the moral framework and values being taught. The Government must recognise that Relationships Education and RSE cut right across religious beliefs.
- ▶ The European Convention on Human Rights includes parents' right to have their children educated in keeping with their convictions. Parents should have a right of withdrawal from both subjects.
- ▶ Parents' consent should be sought for all planned Relationships Education or RSE. This would involve them being told in advance what is going to be covered. (You could suggest an appropriate minimum notice period.)