

Important information for parents on Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)



Two new compulsory school subjects are coming into force in all schools in England in September 2020. These are:

1. Relationships Education in all primary schools
2. Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) in all secondary schools.

Under the new legislation:

- Parents **will not be able to withdraw** their children from Relationships Education.
- Parents **will be able to withdraw** their children in primary school from sex education.
- Parents **will not be able to withdraw** their children from RSE at secondary school.
- Parents will only be able to *request* that their child be withdrawn from the sex education parts of RSE with the final decision being given to the headteacher. From the age of 15 the child has the right to override any parental request that they be withdrawn from Sex Education.

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FAQs for parents on Relationships Education

1. Do I have any say in how Relationships Education and RSE will be taught in my child's school?

In theory, yes. The Government's guidance states that schools are required to consult with parents when developing their policies for Relationships Education and RSE.¹

However, the Department for Education has published a 14-page document titled 'Parental Engagement on Relationships Education'. The main message in this publication is that schools should offer parents the opportunity to have their say, but ultimately the school decides what will be taught. The document can be summarised in this passage on page 2:

'The broad process for engagement should involve the school providing clear information to all parents, in an accessible way, on their proposed programme and policy; parents being given reasonable time to consider this information; the school providing reasonable opportunities for parents to feed in their views; and the school giving consideration to those views from parents. Schools ultimately make the final decisions and engagement does not amount to a parental veto. The Department for Education will back schools that, having engaged with parents and carefully considered their views, take reasonable decisions about their Relationships Education policy.'

Action: Ask your child's school when they plan to hold a consultation and how they plan to ensure that all parents in the school are enabled to give their views. The consultation should include unambiguous questions about issues such as LGBT relationships.

2. Will I be able to see the policy?

Yes, the policy on Relationships Education or RSE must be made available to parents. The policy must 'meet the needs of pupils and parents and reflect the community they serve'. The policy must also include information about 'how the policy has been produced and how it will be kept under review, in both cases working with parents'. The policy must be published on the school's website.²

Action: Ask your child's school to publish the results of the consultation so you can see whether the policy is a fair reflection of the responses received from parents.

3. Will the school show me the resources they will use to teach my child?

The Government has said that schools must show 'examples' of the resources.³

Action: Ask your child's school to show you all resources that will be used to teach your child. This will help to ensure that schools are completely open with parents.

4. Who has the final say about what is taught in Relationships Education and RSE?

The school. The Government has made it clear that what is taught and how it is taught is a decision for the school and that parents cannot veto any part of the curriculum on these two new subjects. Ultimately, this means that a consultation with parents will be completely meaningless if the school ignores the views and feelings of its parents and goes ahead with its own agenda.

5. But hasn't the Government said that parents are the primary educators of their children?

Yes, the Government has said: 'We are clear that parents and carers are the prime educators for their children on many of these matters'.⁴

However, saying this means absolutely nothing when the school can override parents' views. In addition, the legal right to withdraw children from Relationships Education lessons is a critical acknowledgement by the State that parents come first in their children's moral education. After September 2020, because you will not be able to withdraw your child, you will lose the one way of truly asserting your position as the primary educator of your child.

6. Is it still worth engaging with my child's school?

Yes. Polite and well-informed engagement with your child's school is critical. This is an important way to try to protect your child from teaching which is unacceptable or inappropriate. If parents stay silent, the State will encroach even further into the rightful role of parents.

Action: Talk to other parents in your child's school to help ensure that they are fully informed about the new compulsory subjects. You may want to organise parents'

¹Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers. 2019. Page 11

²As above. Pages 11-12

³As above. Page 13

⁴As above. Page 4

⁵As above. Page 16

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groups to explore ways in which you can further influence your child's school.

7. Can I still take my child out of sex education lessons in primary school?

Yes. You will still have a legal right to do this after September 2020. The school governors must make sure that clear information is given to all parents about withdrawal from these classes.⁵

Action: Ask your child's school to show you all the materials which will be used in sex education lessons. Also, ask for the timetable so that you know exactly when these lessons will be delivered. Exercise your right to withdraw your child if you are not happy.

8. Is there a clear distinction between Sex Education and Relationships Education in primary schools?

No. This has been a concern since the new compulsory subject of Relationships Education was announced. Schools may decide to include explicit sexual content into Relationships Education, knowing that parents cannot withdraw their children, in the same way that some primary schools incorporate sex education topics in National Curriculum science lessons.

Action: If you find that your child's school is including explicit sexual content in Relationships Education raise your concerns with the headteacher, the school governors, the Local Authority and ultimately the Department for Education and Social Care. Do not stay silent about this.

9. Can I take my secondary age child out of the sex education component of RSE?

Yes, but only with the permission of the headteacher. You do not have an automatic right to do this and for three terms before your child's 16th birthday your child can go against your wishes and attend sex education classes.⁶

10. Are schools required to teach pupils about marriage?

Yes. The Government has clarified that marriage must be taught as part of Relationships Education, even if this topic is covered in other areas of the curriculum, for example PSHE. The Government has stressed that marriage must be part of the Relationships Education policy 'and therefore

form part of the parental engagement process'.⁷ (Emphasis added.) The parental consultation is the opportunity for parents to speak out against any teaching which confuses children about the real nature of marriage.

11. Will my primary age child be taught about LGBT relationships?

Not necessarily. The Government has stated that primary schools are 'strongly enabled and encouraged to cover LGBT content',⁸ but this is not stating that schools are legally required to do so. (See also front page.)

Action: Make a point of highlighting this to your child's primary school. This is important because it supports those primary schools which would prefer not to cover this area of relationships.

12. Will my secondary age child be taught about LGBT relationships?

Yes. The Government is clear that pupils must receive this teaching at some point while they are at school.⁸ However, the Government has stated that schools have freedom as to how they do this. (See point 7 on the back page.) Therefore it is crucial to try to ensure that teaching on these matters is in line with your values.

13. Will the school simply be educating my child about LGBT relationships rather than promoting them?

No. The Government is trying to sugar coat its policy on LGBT teaching by saying that the new compulsory school subjects 'don't "promote" anything, they educate'.⁹ Educating a child about LGBT relationships cannot be done in a neutral manner in the same way as, for example, teaching maths.

14. If my child goes to a faith school will he/she be exempt from Relationships Education and RSE?

No. These new subjects are compulsory in all schools in England, including faith schools. The Catholic Education Service has welcomed the Government's new subjects saying: 'The proposals announced by the Government... are compatible with the Catholic model curriculum'.¹⁰ You may like to raise this with your bishop if you are a Catholic.

⁶Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers. 2019. Page 18

⁷Department for Education Parental Engagement on Relationships Education 2019. Page 3

⁸Government response Relationships education, relationships and sex education (RSE) and health education: FAQs. Information from the Department for Education about the introduction of compulsory relationships and RSE from September 2020. Published 5 April 2019 Last updated 5 November 2019

⁹As above.

¹⁰Government Announcement on Relationships and Sex Education - CES Statement 25 February 2019 <https://www.catholiceducation.org.uk/component/k2/item/1003661-government-announcement-on-relationships-and-sex-education-ces-statement>

Checklist for parents

Here are key points from the Government's statutory guidance for schools on teaching Relationships Education and RSE

- 1. Consultation with parents.** The Guidance states that schools are required to consult with parents when developing their policies for Relationships Education or RSE (Page 10).
- 2. Meeting the needs of parents.** The policy on Relationships Education or RSE must 'meet the needs of pupils and parents and reflect the community they serve.' The policy must also include information about 'how the policy has been produced and how it will be kept under review, in both cases working with parents' (Pages 11-12).
- 3. Showing parents the resources.** 'Schools should also ensure that, when they consult with parents, they provide examples of the resources that they plan to use as this can be reassuring for parents and enables them to continue the conversations started in class at home' (Page 13).
- 4. Freedom on delivering the content.** The Guidance is clear that schools are 'free to determine how to deliver the content ... in the context of a broad and balanced curriculum' (Page 8).
- 5. Flexibility.** The Guidance states: 'We are determined that the subjects must be deliverable and give schools flexibility to shape their curriculum according to

the needs of their pupils and communities' (Page 4). In addition the Guidance states: 'Schools will retain freedom to determine an age-appropriate, developmental curriculum which meets the needs of young people, is developed in consultation with parents and the local community.' (Page 41).

- 6. LGBT teaching in primary schools.** In May 2019 the Government stated that: 'Primary schools are enabled and encouraged to cover LGBT content if they consider it age appropriate to do so, but there is no specific requirement for this.' In November 2019 the Government changed the wording to read: 'Primary schools are strongly encouraged and enabled to cover LGBT content when teaching about different types of families.'¹ **The Government has watered down its statement on this matter, but it has still not stated that primary schools must teach LGBT content.**
- 7. LGBT teaching in secondary schools.** Even though the Government expects all pupils to have been 'taught LGBT content at a timely point', the Guidance also states that schools are 'free to determine how they do this' (Page 15). This means that schools are not legally obliged, for example, to invite homosexual pressure groups such as Stonewall into the school. Faith schools are free to teach pupils about LGBT relationships in line with their religion.

The Equality Act 2010 and schools

Some parents have reported that their child's school insists that LGBT relationships must be taught in order to comply with the 2010 Equality Act. Here is a short explanation of how the Act in reality impacts on schools:

There are two parts to the equality duty for schools:

- 1.** A 'general' duty to have 'due regard' to eliminating any unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, as well as advancing equality of opportunity and fostering good relations, and
- 2.** a 'specific duty' to publish information to show they are complying with the Act and to prepare and publish one or more specific and measurable equality objectives at least every four years.

This means that:

- These duties can be met in a manner consistent with upholding the rights of parents to raise their children in line with their own religious and moral values, and
- there is no obligation under the Act for schools to promote or affirm same-sex relationships and different family structures. In fact, curriculum content is specifically exempted from discrimination law by the Equality Act.

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