



Department  
for Education

# **Changes to the teaching of Sex and Relationship Education and PSHE**

**A call for evidence**

**Launch date 19 December 2017**

**Respond by 12 February 2018**

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## Introduction

Pupils in England's schools are currently taught about subject areas like relationships and health through SRE and/or PSHE classes (Sex and Relationship Education and Personal, Social, Health and Economic education).

The Department for Education is looking into how we can improve these subjects and make sure pupils are getting the information they need to thrive in the modern world. Whilst we know that many schools are already teaching these subjects and in some cases doing so very well, it is important that we ensure universal coverage for all pupils and improved quality.

The Children and Social Work Act 2017 placed a duty on the Secretary of State for Education to make the new subjects of Relationships Education at primary and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) at secondary mandatory. Relationships and Sex Education will replace SRE.

The Act also provides a power for the Secretary of State to make PSHE, or elements of the subject, mandatory in all schools – subject to careful consideration.

As is already the case where sex education is currently mandatory, schools will also have flexibility over how they teach these subjects so that they can ensure their approach is sensitive to the needs of their pupils and, in the case of faith schools, in accordance with the tenets of their faith. The subjects must be age-appropriate and schools will engage with parents on their approach. Parents will have a right to withdraw their child from sex education in RSE in secondary school. If a primary school chooses to teach sex education, parents will be able to withdraw their child.

## Who this call for evidence is for

- Parents and carers
- School and college staff (including governors)
- Voluntary and community organisations
- Other educational professionals
- Any other interested organisations and individuals

## Issue date

This call for evidence was issued on 19 December 2017.

## **About this call for evidence**

This call for evidence asks for your views on how the content of the subjects and how the current guidance on sex education should be updated. Your comments will be used to help the department further refine our thinking and proposals.

# Changes to the teaching of SRE and PSHE

## Current Policy

We want to help all schools to deliver high-quality SRE and PSHE so that all young people are equipped to have healthy and respectful relationships, and leave school with the knowledge to prepare them for adult life.

Sex education (also known as Sex and Relationship Education) is compulsory in all maintained secondary schools, with many primary schools also choosing to teach it. Academies and free schools are encouraged to teach it as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. When teaching sex education, schools, including academies and primary maintained schools, are required to have regard to the statutory sex and relationship education guidance. The guidance was last updated 17 years ago, in 2000<sup>1</sup>.

Personal, Social, Health and Economic education (PSHE) is a non-compulsory subject in state-funded schools and can encompass many areas of study. All schools are encouraged to teach PSHE and this expectation is outlined in the introduction to the national curriculum. Academies are encouraged to teach PSHE as part of a broad and balanced curriculum. Independent schools are already required to teach PSHE through the Independent School Standards.

## Future position

Through the passage of the Children and Social Work Act 2017, Parliament voted in support of the Government's proposal that all primary schools, including maintained schools, academies and independent schools, would be required to teach **Relationships Education**. All secondary schools, including maintained schools, academies and independent schools, will be required to teach **Relationships and Sex Education** (RSE) – this will replace the current subject of Sex and Relationship Education.

Any decision to also make PSHE compulsory will apply to all schools – maintained schools and academies, both primary and secondary. These schools will join independent schools in having to teach this subject.

We have committed to retaining a parent's right to withdraw their child from sex education within RSE (other than sex education in the National Curriculum as part of

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<sup>1</sup> [Statutory guidance - Sex and relationship education \(July 2000\)](#)

science)<sup>[1]</sup>, but not from relationships education at primary. This is because we believe parents should have the right to teach sex education themselves in a way which is consistent with their values. Schools will be required to publish a policy on sex education, and to communicate with parents on this subject, to enable parents to decide whether or not to withdraw their child. Schools will make alternative arrangements for pupils when they have been withdrawn from particular lessons, such as study time or catch up lessons in other subjects. As we set out in our Policy Statement in March 2017, we will need to include in the regulations the age at which a young person will have the right to make their own decisions. This is because English case law has moved on since the current right to withdraw was put in place and we must now allow young people, once they have reached an age at which they are mature enough to be competent, to make decisions on their education for themselves. This will be carefully balanced with the rights of parents and will be set out in the draft regulations for consultation and then debate in the House before the regulations are passed.

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<sup>[1]</sup> Parents will also be able to withdraw their child from any sex education (beyond the science curriculum) that primary schools choose to teach.

## Proposal and rationale

The Secretary of State for Education announced the Government's ambition to support all young people to stay safe and prepare for life in modern Britain by making Relationships Education (Primary), Relationships and Sex Education (RSE - Secondary) and, subject to the outcome of a thorough consideration of the subject, Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE – primary and secondary) mandatory in all schools.

This decision was taken in recognition of the fact that children need more support to navigate growing up in an increasingly complex and digital world. Whilst the internet is an overwhelmingly positive development in our lives, it does present significant challenges, particularly for young people. The dominance of social media, the prevalence of cyber-bullying and the risk that children learn about relationships from untrustworthy sources – the evidence was compelling that young people need support to make the right decisions and keep themselves safe and happy.

This evidence was supported by the many calls for compulsory SRE and/or PSHE from leading parent representative bodies, as well as leading education and safeguarding organisations, such as teaching unions and charities. These calls were supported by young people themselves.

**A recent YouGov poll for the PSHE association showed that 91% of parents surveyed believe all pupils should receive PSHE lessons to teach them about the risks of sexting, as well as other issues such as contact from strangers online.**

**A Mumsnet survey found that 92% of their parents thought sex and relationship education should be compulsory in secondary schools.**

**A Barnardo's poll of 11-15 year olds also showed that 74% believed that children would be safer if they had age appropriate classes on SRE.**

**A survey of 16- to 24-year-olds carried out by the Terence Higgins Trust in July 2016 showed that 99% of young people thought SRE should be mandatory in all schools; and 1 in 7 had not received this education.**

**Girl Guiding's Advocate Panel** welcomed the changes when they were announced, "We're really pleased to see Justine Greening's announcement ... that she'll be taking steps to make SRE statutory. Since our Girls Matter campaign in 2014, we've called on the Government to introduce high quality compulsory Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) in all schools."

**Barnardo's Chief Executive, Javed Khan** welcomed the changes, "Barnardo's has long campaigned for this vital education so children can better understand the dangers in the real world and online."

**Archbishop Malcolm McMahon, Chairman of the Catholic Education Service** also said: "Our schools have a long track record of educating young people who are prepared for adult life as informed and engaged members of society, and high quality RSE plays an important part of this."

**Stonewall Chief Executive, Ruth Hunt**, agreed: "This is a huge step forward and a fantastic opportunity to improve inclusion and acceptance in education."

**Internet Matters** commented that: "It is vital that children are taught about the issues they face going online at the earliest possible age. Our recent research revealed how six-year-olds today are as digitally advanced as 10-year-olds were three years ago, which reflects the pace at which young people are taking up technology. We welcome the government's announcement and always encourage teachers and parents to work together to tackle issues such as sexting and cyberbullying."

**Russell Hobby, the then general secretary of school leaders' union NAHT**, said: "NAHT have long advocated age-appropriate sex education and PSHE for all pupils in all schools, to help prepare young people for the challenges they will encounter in their adult lives and the current challenges they will face beyond the school gates. We welcome the duties set out today and look forward to playing our part in ensuring SRE/PSHE delivers for young people."

Following a Mumsnet survey on sex education, **Justine Roberts, Chief Executive of Mumsnet** said: "Our survey gives a very clear result: when parents are asked about sex and relationships education in schools, they want compulsory, appropriate education."

We know that many schools are already delivering these subjects well and will continue to do so. In 2013, Ofsted published a report into current PSHE provision<sup>2</sup>, which stated that in those schools surveyed "learning in PSHE education was good or better in 60% of schools and required improvement or was inadequate in 40%."

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<sup>2</sup> [PSHE education in schools: strengths and weaknesses - Ofsted survey report](#)

The quality of PSHE education is not yet good enough in a sizeable proportion of schools in England”.

Schools are free to draw on materials produced by expert organisations e.g. schools use the non-statutory programme of study provided by the PSHE Association<sup>3</sup>. Government also endorsed the supplementary advice for schools, “Sex and relationships education (SRE) for the 21st century”, which was published by the PSHE Association, the Sex Education Forum and Brook. The advice addressed changes in technology and legislation since 2000, equipping teachers to help protect children from inappropriate online content, bullying, harassment and exploitation.

We will ensure that new subjects are carefully designed to safeguard and support pupils and are deliverable for schools. We will also be looking to gain a better understanding of what constitutes good practice in considering all types of diversity, and to gather examples of this. This could include, but is not limited to, areas such as: special educational needs and disability, lesbian, gay, bisexual and trans, faith etc.

We are clear on the themes and issues they should cover to achieve this. Relationships and RSE will be age-appropriate, build knowledge and life skills over time in a way that prepares pupils for issues they will soon face. The subjects will likely focus on:

- different types of relationships, including friendships, family relationships, dealing with strangers and, at secondary school, intimate relationships;
- how to recognise, understand and build healthy relationships, including self-respect and respect for others, commitment (including marriage and civil partnerships), boundaries and consent, tolerance, and how to manage conflict, and also how to recognise unhealthy relationships, including bullying, coercion and exploitation;
- healthy relationships and safety online, including use of social media, cyber-bullying, sexting;
- how relationships may affect health and wellbeing, including the importance of good mental health and resilience; and
- set firmly within the context of relationships, factual knowledge at secondary school about sex, sexual health and sexuality.

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<sup>3</sup> [PSHE Association – Programme of Study \(Key stages 1 – 5\)](#)

We will be planning implementation at a sensible pace to allow schools to start the work now, making steady, effective improvements to their provision. This will ensure that we are building an evidence-based approach to reform that works for schools and makes sure that all children benefit from a more consistent approach.

## Call for evidence

***For each of the questions below, we will only be able to read the first 250 words of your answer – please be concise.***

*When our reforms are implemented, Relationships Education will be compulsory in all primary schools and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) will be compulsory in all secondary schools. We have been clear in Parliament that the overarching objective for these subjects is child safety, safe relationships, both online and offline, and preparing pupils for adult life.*

*We want to understand more about views on how we should update the statutory guidance for Relationships Education and RSE (this relates to lessons about sex and relationships outside the national curriculum for science). This should include consideration of how changes in technology and society should be reflected, such as the importance of internet safety given the increasing use of the internet (changes in the law relating to same-sex marriage and civil partnerships and the Equality Act). This feedback will help us develop the updated statutory guidance which has not been updated since 2000 (this will be further updated after 3 years and periodically thereafter) and will facilitate schools' delivery of age-appropriate subject content that meets the needs of all pupils.*

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.
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.

*We are particularly interested in understanding views on Relationships Education and RSE which are specific to the digital context.*

3. 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?

*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.*

4. 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?

*PSHE is a planned programme of school-based educational opportunities and experiences that deal with the real life issues children and young people face as they grow up, typically covering personal wellbeing and economic wellbeing. We are considering whether to make PSHE compulsory alongside Relationships Education and RSE.*

*We know that many schools are already teaching these subjects well and are using their professional judgement to design a curriculum that suits the needs of their pupils. We are interested in understanding the content you think children should be taught as part of PSHE.*

5. Thinking about PSHE in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please include your reasons for choosing each subject area or evidence to support your suggestions.
6. Thinking about PSHE in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please also include your reasons for choosing each subject or evidence to support your suggestions.
7. How much flexibility do you think schools should have to meet the needs of individual pupils and to reflect the diversity of local communities and wider society in the content of PSHE lessons in schools?

## **Enquiries**

If your enquiry is related to the policy content of the consultation you can contact the team by email - [PSHE-RSE.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:PSHE-RSE.consultation@education.gov.uk)

If your enquiry is related to the DfE e-consultation website or the consultation process in general, you can contact the DfE Ministerial and Public Communications Division by email: [Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk](mailto:Consultations.Coordinator@education.gov.uk) or by telephone: 0370 000 2288 or via the [DfE Contact us page](#).

## Respond online

To help us analyse the responses please use the online system wherever possible. Visit [www.education.gov.uk/consultations](http://www.education.gov.uk/consultations). If for exceptional reasons you are unable to use the online system, for example because you use specialist accessibility software that is not compatible with the system, you may send us your views by email to [PSHE-RSE.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:PSHE-RSE.consultation@education.gov.uk) or by post to:

RSE and PSHE team

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## Deadline and response

This call for evidence closes at 11.59pm on 12 February 2018. The results of the call for evidence and the Department's response will be published on GOV.UK in spring 2018.

## Confidentiality of your responses

Information provided in response to consultations may be subject to publication or disclosure under the Freedom of Information Act 2000 or the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

The Department for Education will only process any personal data received as part of this consultation (e.g. any identifying material) in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998. This means that; your personal data will only be used for the purpose of the call for evidence, it will not be disclosed to third parties unless the law requires it and you will not be identifiable from any published reports.

If you want all, or any part, of a response to be treated as confidential, please explain why you consider it to be confidential.

If a request for disclosure of the information you have provided is received, your explanation about why you consider it to be confidential will be taken into account, but no assurance can be given that confidentiality can be maintained.

Thank you very much for completing the call for evidence. The results will be used to help us better understand what good teaching of PSHE/RSE looks like.

Please let us know any further comments or thoughts that you would like to share with us by emailing us at: [PSHE-RSE.consultation@education.gov.uk](mailto:PSHE-RSE.consultation@education.gov.uk)



Department  
for Education

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