

Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education

Parent/carer FAQs for Hertfordshire Primary schools

Why is there new guidance on Relationships Education, Sex Education and Health Education from the Department of Education?

Before this development, the Department for Education's guidance to schools on Relationships and Sex Education was last updated in 2000, and it clearly no longer accurately reflects the world we live in.

The new guidance was finalised and passed into law by Parliament in 2019, with overwhelming support in both houses. It aims to create a curriculum that:

- fosters pupils' respect for themselves and others;
- promotes equality and values difference;
- educates pupils about positive relationships;
- helps pupils understand how their actions can impact on their health, wellbeing and safety.

It also aims to meet the needs of all pupils, whatever their developing identity and family circumstances, and to prepare them for life and work in modern Britain.

The Secretary of State stated in his Forward* to the guidance:

'These subjects represent a huge opportunity to help our children and young people develop. The knowledge and attributes gained will support their own, and others', wellbeing and attainment and help young people to become successful and happy adults who make a meaningful contribution to society.'

In a great many schools, this curriculum will be delivered through the school's existing Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) Education and will require very little change.

* Source: [GOV UK | Statutory Guidance Forward by the Secretary of State](#)

When will the new guidance on Relationships Education and Health Education be delivered in schools?

The guidance comes into effect from September 2020, when it will be statutory that:

- all primary schools in England teach Relationships Education
- all primary schools in England teach Health Education

Do faith schools have to teach Relationships Education?

Yes. The new legislation makes Relationships Education a compulsory requirement in all primary schools. This includes maintained schools, academies, special schools, free schools, and independent schools.

Faith schools recognise the importance of providing the best possible support to their pupils to prepare them for the challenges that life will bring. As one example, The Church of England welcomes the new legislation as it supports their faith vision:

“In Church of England schools, and in all schools, we want young people to flourish and to gain every opportunity to live fulfilled lives. For Church schools, RSE is about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, healthy relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health.”

Will primary schools have to teach sex education? Isn't this too young?

Many primary schools currently teach sex education, and it is strongly recommended by the government that this continues. The decision about if and when to teach sex education (which goes beyond the content of the science curriculum) remains a decision that individual primary schools must make. Schools will outline what will be taught and when it will be delivered.

You can discuss this with the school to understand what they propose to teach and how.

What has changed from the previous requirements regarding the delivery of sex education?

The definition of what constitutes sex education in schools has been tightened. Schools that deliver sex education will ensure parents/carers know what will be taught as part of the Relationships Education and Health Education curriculum, and in which year groups. Schools will clarify what they teach as part of the sex education curriculum in science and what they teach as part of the RSE and Health curriculum in school policy.

Teaching about the changing adolescent body and puberty is not part of the sex education curriculum. It is part of the compulsory health curriculum.

Who will be delivering the sex education teaching?

This will usually be the class teacher. Visitors may also contribute to the curriculum, but schools will always ensure their messages and approaches are in line with the school values and policy.

Does the Department for Education's guidance state exactly what needs to be taught?

The guidance sets out the key learning that pupils must receive by the end of their primary education. Schools will decide exactly how they teach the curriculum and what resources they will use. Information about this should be in the school policy.

What are the key themes that will be taught in relationships education in primary school?

- Families and people who care for me
- Caring friendships
- Respectful relationships
- Online relationships
- Being safe

What values underpin Relationships Education?

The core values include:

- the importance of stable, loving relationships
- respect for all
- rights, responsibilities and the law
- equality
- acceptance of diversity
- kindness
- generosity
- honesty

What are the key themes that will be taught in Health Education?

- Mental wellbeing
- Internet safety and harms
- Physical health and fitness
- Healthy eating
- Drugs, alcohol and tobacco
- Health and prevention
- Basic first aid
- Changing adolescent body

Will I be consulted before these subjects are taught?

Yes. Schools will engage and consult with parents/carers when developing and reviewing their policies for Relationships Education, Sex Education and Health Education. Parents/carers are encouraged to take up the opportunities when they are offered.

Schools may consult parents/carers in different ways, so you may be invited to a consultation meeting or to give your views through surveys, for example. There will be opportunities to find out the content that is in the curriculum, to see examples of materials the school will use and to ask questions and share any concerns.

Schools will listen to parent/carer views, but they must deliver the statutory curriculum content. Parent/carer consultation does not provide the power to veto curriculum content. Exactly how the curriculum is taught is ultimately a decision for the school.

Can I request my child be excused from Relationships Education?

No. Parents/carers will not be able to request that their child/ren be excused from any part of Relationships Education.

Can I request my child be excused from Health Education?

No. Parents will not be able to request that their child/ren be excused from Health Education. Health Education includes the teaching of the correct terminology for body parts and learning about the changing adolescent body in a timely way to ensure children are prepared for changes they will experience before they happen.

Can I request my child be excused from the Sex Education curriculum?

Yes. Parents/carers will be able to request that their child be excused from those parts of lessons that are defined as 'sex education' in the school's RSE policy. Parents/carers cannot request their child be excused from any sex education covered in the science curriculum.

Parents/carers should note that the science curriculum includes discussion about human reproduction. Discussion of sex within relationships education, therefore, provides opportunities to set this learning in the context of meaningful relationships, personal values, health and safety.

It is hoped that when parents/carers have opportunities to find out more about what will be taught and how, very few parents/carers will want to do this. Parents/carers requesting to excuse their child from sex education will be invited to discuss their concerns with a member of staff and asked to specify which particular aspects of sex education content they wish to withdraw their child from.

Will excusing my child from sex education mean they will not learn about sex?

No. The school cannot guarantee that pupils will not learn about sex from other sources outside the classroom. There are many places that children can get information from including: parents/carers, peers, older siblings and the internet. The accuracy of the information they access will be variable.

The delivery of Sex Education within Relationships and Sex Education ensures that what pupils learn is age and developmentally appropriate, addresses their real questions and is based on important values and the law.

Can I request my child be excused from the elements of sex education taught through the science curriculum?

No. Parents/carers cannot request that their child/ren be excused from any part of the science curriculum, including lessons about reproduction and human development.

Can I request my child be excused from lessons about the changing adolescent body and puberty (including teaching about wet dreams and periods)?

No. Parents/carers cannot request that their child/ren be excused from elements of Health Education.

They can only request that their child/ren be excused from what the school defines as 'sex education' in their Relationships Education policy.

There have been protests in the news about the new curriculum being LGBT-inclusive. Can I request that my child be excused from lessons about LGBT people and relationships?

No. The purpose of the Relationships Education is to educate pupils, age appropriately, about relationships and diversity in the world they live in. It is important that pupils know that different families and individuals exist and are respected under the law.

LGBT-inclusive curriculum content is not new: it has been a requirement for all schools under the Equality Act 2010. The new Relationships Education curriculum reinforces this by clarifying that the lessons children receive in school must be inclusive of diverse families and be relevant to all pupils. The teaching must promote equality and respect, present material that is accurate and balanced, and it must be underpinned by legal rights and responsibilities. Content related to LGBT people will therefore be fully integrated into the curriculum, rather than being delivered in stand-alone lessons. Parents/carers will not be able to request that their child/ren be excused from this.

Will family diversity be represented?

Yes. Families, both in school and in the wider world, sometimes look different from a child's own family. Pupils will be taught that British society values diversity and that all families deserve respect. Families are characterised by love and care, even though this may be expressed through different traditions and values.

In schools, learning about families must be inclusive. The Relationships Education curriculum must allow every child the right to see their family represented and all pupils must be confident and safe to speak about who they live with and who cares for them.

What will my role as a parent/carer be in Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education teaching?

Will our family values be undermined by the curriculum in any way?

Parents/carers are partners with the school in this important area of education, helping to keep children safe and supporting them to thrive.

Schools will inform parents/carers about what is being taught across each year group, so that parents/carers can support the learning at home before or after lessons. This gives families the opportunity to talk about their own values, experiences and perspectives.

The government recognises in the guidance that:

'parents are the first teachers of their children. They have the most significant influence in enabling their children to grow and mature and to form healthy relationships.'

Will schools teach about a range of relationships: marriage, civil partnerships, relationships outside of marriage and same sex relationships?

Yes. The curriculum enables children to understand the importance of a stable, secure and loving environment for family life and will include the range of different family types that can provide this.

Teaching will therefore represent the full range of committed and mutually supportive stable relationships in our society, including religious and civil marriages, civil partnerships, and relationships outside of formal commitment. The range of families represented will include stepfamilies, same-sex parents, grandparents as parents, adoptive families, and more.

When will this guidance be reviewed again by the DfE?

The guidance is set to be reviewed in 2022.

For more information, advice and training about the introduction of the new Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education curriculum, please contact the Herts for Learning Wellbeing team at wellbeing@hertsforlearning.co.uk or visit hertsforlearning.co.uk

April 2020