

Up-to-speed on: the statutory relationships, RSE and health education guidance

The DfE has released the final version of the statutory guidance for three new subjects – relationships education, RSE and health education.

This article breaks down what you need to know, including what subjects must be delivered, what subject matters need to be covered, and parents' rights in relation to withdrawing their children from lessons.

[New] Schools will have flexibility on when to begin delivering the curriculum

The DfE has confirmed that relationships and health education in primary schools and RSE and health education in secondary schools will become compulsory from September 2020 as planned; however, due to the impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19), schools are being offered flexibility on when to begin delivering these subjects within the 2020/2021 academic year.

Schools that are prepared to deliver teaching in these subjects and have met the requirements in the DfE's '[Relationships education, relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#)' guidance are being encouraged to begin delivering teaching from 1 September 2020, or whenever practicable to do so within the first few weeks of the academic year. Schools that feel they will not be able to meet the requirements due to the impact of coronavirus (e.g. time lost in school and competing priorities) should start teaching the subjects as soon as practically possible, and no later than the start of the Summer term in 2021. In these cases, a phased approach should be used (if needed) when introducing the subjects.

What schools must deliver

From September 2020:

- Relationships education will be compulsory in all primary schools.
- RSE will be compulsory in all secondary schools.
- Health education will be compulsory in all schools except independent schools (it will be statutory in academies and free schools).

Primary schools may also choose to teach aspects of sex education; however, this is not a requirement.

Schools are free to determine how to deliver the content of these subjects as set out in the statutory guidance – all the issues that are covered should be delivered in an age-appropriate way.

Sixth-form colleges, 16-19 academies and FE colleges are not required to deliver these subjects; however, the DfE encourages these settings to offer them to support their pupils.



Relationships education content

Relationships education in primary school covers content including:

- Different kinds of relationships – including friendships, families and people pupils can go to for support.
- Characteristics of healthy relationships.
- How to take turns, and how to treat others with kindness, consideration and respect.
- The importance of honesty, permission seeking and giving, and the concept of personal privacy.
- Personal space and boundaries, showing respect, and understanding the differences between appropriate and inappropriate contact.
- Online safety and appropriate behaviour online.
- Developing personal attributes including honesty, integrity, courage, humility, kindness, generosity, trustworthiness and a sense of justice.
- Positive emotional and mental wellbeing, including how friendships can support mental wellbeing.
- How to recognise and report abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse.



Sex education in primary schools

Relationship education, **not** sex education, will be compulsory in primary schools.

Although it is not a requirement, many primary schools already choose to teach some aspects of sex education and will continue to do so. To support pupils' transition from primary to secondary school, the DfE recommends that all primary schools should have a sex education programme tailored to the age and maturity of their pupils.

Sex education at primary level should ensure pupils are prepared for the changes that adolescence brings and, drawing on knowledge of the human life cycle set out in the science curriculum, how a baby is conceived and born. Schools should engage with parents about the detailed content of what may be taught.



RSE content

RSE in secondary schools should continue to build upon the knowledge from primary school and cover additional content including:

- What healthy friendships, working relationships, intimate relationships and other committed relationships look like.
- How healthy relationships can benefit mental wellbeing and self-respect.
- Developing resilience and character in pupils.
- How to identify when relationships are unhealthy.
- Contraception, developing intimate relationships, resisting, and not applying, pressure to have sex.
- What is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in relationships.

- Safer sex and sexual health.
- Facts and the law about sex, sexuality, sexual health and gender identity.
- The law relating to sex, including the age of consent, what consent is and is not, the definitions and recognition of rape, sexual assault and harassment, and choices permitted by the law around pregnancy.
- Grooming, sexual exploitation and domestic abuse.
- FGM – including the physical and emotional damage it can cause, and how to access support.
- Rules and principles for keeping safe online.
- How data is generated, collected, shared and used online.



Physical health and mental wellbeing education

Teaching at primary level should focus on:

- The importance of daily exercise, good nutrition and sufficient sleep.
- The steps pupils can take to protect their own and others' health and wellbeing – this includes teaching simple self-care techniques, personal hygiene, how to prevent health and wellbeing problems, and basic first aid.
- The relationship between good physical health and good mental wellbeing – including the benefits exercise and spending time outdoors can have on mental wellbeing.
- The benefits of hobbies, interests and participation in communities.
- The benefits of rationing the time spent online and the risks of excessive use of electronic devices.
- Issues relating to isolation, loneliness, unhappiness and bullying, and the negative impact of poor health and wellbeing.
- Why social media, computer games and online gaming have age restrictions, and how to manage common online difficulties – this should be covered later in primary schools.

Teaching at secondary level should build on primary knowledge, and also cover:

- The impact of puberty on pupils' health and wellbeing.
- The steps pupils can take to support their own health and wellbeing.
- The benefits of sufficient sleep, good nutrition and strategies for building resilience.
- How outward facing activities, especially those with a service focus (e.g. volunteering), are beneficial for wellbeing.
- Signs of loneliness and isolation.
- Factual information about the prevalence and characteristics of more serious mental and physical health conditions, drugs and alcohol, and information about effective interventions.
- Eating disorders – qualified support should be sought if schools choose to cover this.
- The impact of time spent online, the positive aspects of online support and how to negotiate social media, online forums and gaming.
- How pupils can judge when they, or someone they know, needs support and when to seek help.

Puberty and menstruation should be covered at primary and secondary level – where possible, these subjects should be addressed before onset.

Policies

All primary schools **must** have a written policy for relationships education and secondaries must have an RSE policy. Where a maintained primary school chooses to teach aspects of sex education (which go beyond the national curriculum for science), the school must set this out in their policy and should consult with parents on what will be covered.

Schools must publish these policies on their websites and must provide a copy of the policies free of charge to anyone who requests them. Links to our compliant policy templates are available in the [‘What’s next?’](#) section.

Schools should ensure that, when they engage with parents, they provide examples of the resources they plan to use, for example, the books they will use in lessons.

Religion and belief

All schools must consider the religious background of pupils when planning the teaching of these subjects. Faith perspectives may be taught by all schools. Schools with a religious character may teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships, e.g. a school may wish to reflect on how their faith institutions may support people in matters of relationships and sex.

Equality

Relationships education, RSE and health education must be accessible for all pupils. When delivering these subjects, schools:

- Must not unlawfully discriminate against pupils because of any protected characteristics they possess under the Equality Act 2010.
- Should consider the needs of their own pupils and whether it is appropriate to put in place additional support for pupils with certain protected characteristics.
- Must make reasonable adjustments to alleviate any disadvantage faced by pupils with SEND.
- Should tailor subject content for pupils with SEND, where necessary.
- Should ensure assumptions are not made based on certain characteristics, e.g. boys should not be made to feel that inappropriate sexual behaviour, including sexual violence and harassment, is an inevitable part of being male.
- Should fully integrate teaching of LGBTQ+ issues into programmes of study, rather than delivering this content as standalone lessons.

Withdrawing pupils

Parents have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of the sex education aspect of RSE – any requests and the decisions made should be recorded.

Headteachers should first discuss the request with parents, to clarify the reasoning behind it and to explain the benefits of receiving this education and any detrimental effects withdrawal may have on the pupil.

After these discussions, schools should respect the parent's request to withdraw their child, up to, and until, three terms before the child turns 16 – after this point, schools should make arrangements for the pupil to receive sex education should the pupil want to.

Primary schools that choose to deliver sex education must automatically grant a request for withdrawal.

There is no right to withdraw from relationships education at primary or secondary level.



FAQs

Question: How is the final version of the statutory guidance different to the draft guidance?

Answer: No major changes were made to the statutory guidance when it went from draft form to the final document. There were some minor clarifications made to the guidance – the DfE added:

- Section 403 of the Education Act 1996 to the list of legislation that the guidance was issued under.
- 'Menopause' to the list of things that pupils should know about reproductive health by the time they finish secondary school.
- 'Allergies' to the list of health-related facts and science that pupils should know about by the end of primary school.

Question: Do schools need to engage with parents before teaching these subjects?

Answer: Schools are required to consult parents when developing and reviewing their RSE and relationships education policies; however, parents cannot veto curriculum content.

Question: Do the new subjects teach about LGBTQ+ relationships?

Answer: Yes, but they do not promote any specific relationship types, they simply educate pupils about the society in which they are growing up and encourage respect for others. Secondary schools should cover LGBT content in their RSE teaching – this should include age-appropriate teaching about different types of relationships in the context of the law.

Question: What support will schools receive to deliver these subjects well?

Answer: A new online service will be available in Spring 2020 to help teachers introduce these subjects with confidence. There will also be training available for teachers through existing regional networks, offering opportunities to improve subject knowledge and build confidence.

Question: How is pupils' faith taken into account?

Answer: In all schools, the religious background of pupils must be taken into account when planning teaching. Schools with a religious character can build on the core content by reflecting their beliefs in their teaching. Several faith organisations have produced teaching materials that schools can choose to use.

More answers to common FAQs are available [here](#).



What's next?

- You can read the statutory guidance in full [here](#).
- Relationships education, RSE and health education will become compulsory from September 2020; however, the DfE encouraged schools to start teaching the subjects from September 2019.
- To help schools to prepare, the DfE will allocate £6 million in 2019/2020 for a school support package to cover training and resources. Support will also be provided to early-adopter schools.
- To save time when drafting your up-to-date policy, use our [Primary Relationships and Health Education Policy](#) or our [Secondary School RSE and Health Education Policy](#) template.

Bibliography

DfE (2019) 'Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education'

DfE (2019) 'Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Health Education in England: Government consultation response', p.23

DfE (2019) 'All pupils will be taught about mental and physical wellbeing' <<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/all-pupils-will-be-taught-about-mental-and-physical-wellbeing>> [Accessed: 26 February 2019]

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