

The National Association for Primary Education

Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)

Relationships Education is compulsory in all primary schools (including all-through schools and middle schools) in England and Relationships and Sex Education is compulsory in all secondary schools (DfE, 2019) from September 2020. The DfE (2019) makes it clear that it wants the subject to:

'put in place the key building blocks of healthy, respectful relationships, focusing on family and friendships in all contexts...' (p.4).

Schools are free to determine how to deliver the content within Relationships Education and RSE in the context of a broad and balanced curriculum, that will most likely be part of a PSHCE curriculum, with the assistance of brought in specialist provision. Schools are also obliged to have a written policy for Relationships Education and RSE in consultation with parents and it would not be uncommon to include governors and the wider community in this process.

The context in which Relationships Education is being taught is one of collaboration, respect for the law, and a considered approach to equality and diversity. It is intended that children learn about such matters of positive relationships in preparation for life in modern Britain that takes into account changing societal patterns, familial situations, respect and care and an understanding of differing faith and beliefs.

NAPE realises that Relationships Education exists within the law as expressed by the Equality Act 2010 in which schools must not unlawfully discriminate against children's noted characteristics. In addition, many children and students are living in a time of frenetic internet usage, social media and fake news. An emphasis on positive and healthy relationships allows children and students to be safe and mature into adults where they can be aware of unhealthy matters, for example: female genital mutilation, forced marriage, honour-based violence, coercion into unwilling practices, domestic abuse, poor sexual health, financial oppression or any form of social injustice.

There have been some organisations who have been protesting against the statutory teaching of Relationships Education and RSE in state schools. The protest seems to arise from the decision by government to change the '*right to be excused*'. As it stands parents and carers of children in state secondary schools may exercise the '*right to be excused*' (withdrawal) from some or all of sex education within RSE; but cannot exercise the '*right to be excused*' in the curriculum subject of science's teaching of reproduction, or from Relationships Education or Health Education. Within primary education, parents cannot exercise the '*right to be excused*' from Relationships Education.

Schools are open about the teaching of Relationships Education and RSE. If parties are unsure of the curriculum content and how it should be taught, schools would then be open

to hosting parents' meetings to discuss this. Schools would teach without judgement, with a willingness for equality and diversity under the applicable laws of the country. Schools are also provided with guidance that teaching should consider children from a faith background, and acknowledge that parents can express their own views within the home. If a parent wishes to withdraw a child from Relationships Education, then that can be done only at the discretion of the head teacher.

NAPE acknowledges the importance and necessity of Relationships Education and RSE. Dialogue and openness are important aspects in order to alleviate any concerns some parents or carers may have about this subject. It is desirable to enable children to become safe and healthy citizens, who can make appropriate decisions, in preparation for living cohesively in a diverse and tolerant nation through well-informed and law-abiding teaching that is underpinned by democratic debate and consultation.

Source:

DfE (2019) *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education*. Department for Education.

Position Paper 17 - November 2019