



2022-0015674RWPO

Robin Walker MP

Minister of State for School Standards

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/contactus/dfe

Mr Piers Shepherd,
Senior Researcher,
Family Education Trust

By email: info@familyeducationtrust.org.uk

4 May 2022

Dear Mr Shepherd,

Thank you for your letter of 14 April, addressed to the Secretary of State, regarding relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) in schools. I am replying as the Minister of State for School Standards.

Thank you for the work you are carrying out in this important area. The Department agrees it is vital that all children should be supported whilst growing up. Our schools and teachers are committed to supporting all pupils to thrive and reach their potential in a safe and respectful environment. Schools play an important role in preparing pupils for life in modern Britain. This involves supporting pupils to understand the society in which they grow up and teaching about respect for other people and for difference.

Sexual abuse in all forms is abhorrent, every child has a right to be protected from all forms of abuse, including child sexual abuse. We are committed to stepping up our response to prevent these crimes and improve support and outcomes for victims and survivors. In education, we are doing so through RSHE curriculum, which became compulsory in state schools from September 2020.

Ensuring children receive high quality RSHE is key to achieving this, and this should include teaching pupils from an early age about the concept of consent in an age-appropriate way. Although the RSHE primary curriculum does not reference consent explicitly, it is designed to help younger children understand what healthy relationships look like and the importance of respecting others' boundaries and privacy. This includes ensuring young people understand that they have rights over their own bodies and equipping them with the knowledge they need to recognise and to report abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse. The statutory guidance for the RSHE curriculum is available at: tinyurl.com/45a69Jkt.

Schools have a major role to play in fostering healthy and respectful peer-to-peer communication and behaviour between boys and girls by providing a safe environment, where harmful sexual behaviour is challenged, as part of a whole-school approach.

It is important that teachers have the confidence to teach RSHE effectively, and to help schools with this we have already published a range of online Teacher Training Modules, available at: tinyurl.com/3ssfJrnc, covering each of the key subject areas, including Respectful Relationships and Being Safe.

There is, however, more work to do. The report on sexual abuse in residential schools and Ofsted's review of sexual abuse and harassment in schools and colleges told us that some teachers still lack the confidence to teach some of the more sensitive topics relating to sexual abuse and harassment. To respond directly to this, we are developing a supplementary package of support for schools, including new non-statutory guidance, which will build on the existing RSHE statutory guidance and provide more detail on when specific content around harassment and abuse, including consent, should be taught.

The Department has also run three webinars for teachers and other professionals, covering aspects of teaching about sexual abuse in the curriculum. The subjects of these webinars, which took place in March, were domestic abuse and coercion, pornography and the impact of harmful content online, and sexual exploitation. Recordings of these are available at: tinyurl.com/2P852t45.

Schools are responsible for setting their own policies on RSHE subjects, in line with the statutory guidance. We expect them to consult with parents and to make reasonable decisions about their curriculum. Schools should ensure that when consulting parents, they provide examples of the content and resources that they plan to use, as this can be reassuring for parents and enables them to continue the conversation started in class, at home. In all schools, when teaching these subjects, the religious background of all pupils must be taken into account when planning teaching, so that the core topics are appropriately handled. All schools may teach about faith perspectives. All schools must have in place a written policy for relationships education and RSE which is made available to parents and others free of charge.

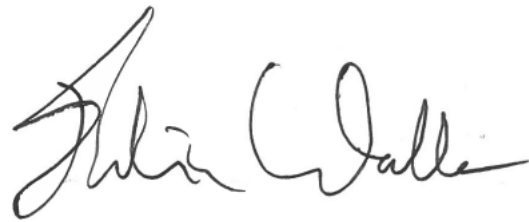
The RSHE implementation guidance, available at: tinyurl.com/msfwfacv, sets out clear guidance for schools in choosing resources, and states that schools should assess all resources carefully to ensure they are age appropriate, meet the outcome of the relevant part of the curriculum, and are in line with the school's legal duties in relation to impartiality.

The Department cannot advise schools on which resources, external speakers or organisations will be the most suitable for schools to use, not least because schools operate in a variety of different contexts and have both the expertise and knowledge that makes them best placed to make these decisions. Many schools draw on the work of subject associations when choosing resources.

Schools are also responsible for ensuring that they check a visitor or visiting organisation's credentials. They should ensure that the teaching or other content delivered by the visitor fits with their planned programme and their published policy.

Where an individual has concerns about these matters, the quickest and most effective route to take is to raise the issue directly with the school. This will give the school the opportunity to respond and, where appropriate, take action to mitigate the concerns. All schools in England must have a formal school's complaints procedure, which is often on the school's website and should set out the kind of complaints the school deals with.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Julie Waller'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name 'Julie' and the last name 'Waller' clearly distinguishable.