
Parental Checklist (Secondary) for Relationships and Sex Education School Policies

From September 2020 there will be a new requirement to teach Relationships and Sex Education in every secondary school in England (with schools having been encouraged to teach the subject from September 2019).

According to the Government's RSE guidance¹, "all schools must have in place a written policy for Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE). Schools must consult parents in developing and reviewing their policy. Schools should ensure that the policy meets the needs of pupils and parents and reflects the community they serve."²

Therefore, all parents of secondary age children should have the opportunity to engage with the school as they prepare their written policy for the new syllabus. Here is a short checklist to help you understand what might be covered in the policy and what questions you can consider asking.

Before the policy has been developed (or is being reviewed)

- Find out when (and how) your school will be consulting on the new written policies it is required to have in place before September 2020, when it becomes required to teach Relationships and Sex Education, or if it has already.
- Find out if your school is planning to use both/either parental surveys or parental meetings as part of the consultation and encourage other parents to participate. [This can include the topics that will be covered and in which years.]

When reviewing your school's policy

When reviewing the school's Relationships and Sex Education policy (whether a draft or the adopted one), you may wish to consider (and ask the school):

- If the school will be using particular pre-packaged curriculum(s) (and if so which).
- Ask the school to clarify which parts of the RSE teaching are Sex Education and therefore eligible for parents to request an opt-out. When reviewing those parts, consider if you want to request your child be opted out.
 - Note, due to the Government recently changing the law, if a child is over 15 it is their decision whether they want to be opted out, not the parents.
 - Note, while not entirely clear in the RSE guidance on what is Relationships Education and what is Sex Education within RSE at secondary age, all those topics/issues listed in the "Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health" section (page 27-30) could be presumed to be Sex Education by the fact they are not listed in the Relationships Education taught in primary.
- If the examples of content the school has included (schools should to do this according to paragraph 24 of the RSE guidance) give you a good idea of what will actually be taught. This should also include what age this content is for as all content should be "age-appropriate".
 - You can ask for examples of content around particular topics given their sensitivity (but the school doesn't have to agree to make these particular ones available). This could include the topics the RSE guidance says schools "should" teach, which includes:
 - Abortion
 - Contraception
 - Consent
 - Pornography
 - Pregnancy
 - Sexually transmitted diseases
 - Confidential sexual and reproductive health advice
- The RSE guidance expects that "all pupils have been taught LGBT content at a timely point" (paragraph 37) and this includes "sexual orientation" and "gender identity" (paragraph 75).
 - Therefore, you may wish to clarify with your school what it considers to be a "timely point" and what the content for those lessons includes.
 - This can also include how it is "age-appropriate" and, like all RSE teaching, "takes into account the religious background of the pupils". (Paragraph 20)

- Find out whether, as required by the RSE guidance, the policy mentions that the religious background of all pupils is taken into account when planning teaching and how specifically the school proposes to do this (for example, parental surveys or internal school checks on the suitability and sensitivity of teaching).
- Find out if the school will use external providers for the delivery of some of these lessons.
 - If it does plan on using external providers, check whether the policy explicitly states that parents and carers will be notified beforehand about the name of the organisation and the specific content and topic that organisation will be teaching on.
 - If it does not mention these specific things, and is being created or revised, you can ask for them to be included. You could possibly suggest something along the lines of:
 - “Regarding the school’s policy about external providers or organisations coming in as part of Relationships and Sex Education, I think it would be helpful if the policy noted that the school would notify parents ahead of time about which organisation and what content external providers might be teaching. This way we can better help complement the teaching my child is receiving at school.”

If you have any concerns about the policy or the school’s answers to your enquiries, you may want to talk with other parents about these concerns and together think about how you can positively respond to the school regarding these issues, including by suggesting alternative options and content. But remember, the school is ultimately responsible for the content of its curriculum.

Endnotes

1. https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/805781/Relationships_Education__Relationships_and_Sex_Education__RSE__and_Health_Education.pdf
2. RSE Guidance (July 2019), Para 13, p.11