

Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (RSHE) in Church of England Schools

The Church of England Education Office faith-sensitive and inclusive approach to Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education¹ (RSE) and Health Education (RSHE) is underpinned by two key biblical passages:

So God created humankind in his image, in the image of God he created them. (Genesis 1:27, NRSV)

I have come in order that you might have life—life in all its fullness. (John 10:10, GNB)

Everyone will be treated with dignity as all people are made in the image of God and loved equally by God.



All pupils have a right to an education which enables them to flourish and is set in a learning community where differences of lifestyle and opinion (within that which is permissible under UK law) are treated with dignity and respect; bullying of all kinds is eliminated; and where they are free to be themselves and fulfil their potential without fear.

Some key principles

The Church of England's Pastoral Advisory Group has set out some principles for living well together, accommodating difference and diversity within churches², especially in relation to LGBTI+ people, which provide helpful context and principles for schools.

Church of England schools should ensure that their RSHE³ curriculum protects, informs and nurtures all pupils. It should clearly differentiate between factual teaching (biology, medicine, the law, marriage, different types of families and the composition of society) and moral teaching about relationships and values, recognising that the distinction can be easily blurred and there needs to be discernment about the manner in which this is taught within a moral (but not moralistic) framework.



¹ Where, after consultation with parents and carers, primary schools decide to include elements of sex education in their curriculum.

² www.churchofengland.org/sites/default/files/2019-02/PAG-PP-website.pdf

³ The rest of this document uses RSHE to indicate either Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education as determined by the school context.

RSHE should ensure that children are able to cherish themselves and others as unique and wonderfully made, keep themselves safe and able to form healthy relationships where they respect and afford dignity to others⁴. It will provide pupils with the knowledge that will enable them to navigate and contextualise a world in which many will try to tell them how to behave, what to do and what to think. It will help them to develop the skills to express their own views and make their own informed decisions. This is a responsibility that should normally be shared between parents and school.

All schools and academies are required to act within the requirements of the law, including the Equality Act of 2010⁵. The Church of England welcomes, supports and expects the teaching of Relationships and Health Education in all Church of England primary schools. It is up to each primary school to decide whether they wish to choose to teach some aspects of Sex Education but we encourage schools (following consultation with parents) to offer age- appropriate provision. In Church of England secondary schools Relationships, Sex and Health Education will be taught. In all schools where Sex Education is taught parents will have the right to withdraw their children from that part of the curriculum ‘other than as part of the science curriculum’.⁶

All schools should approach RSHE in a faith-sensitive⁷ and inclusive way. Such an approach should seek to understand and appreciate differences within and across the teachings of the faith and other communities the school serves. It should afford dignity and worth to the views of pupils from the faith and other communities represented in the school as part of ensuring that the Equality Act of 2010 is applied in the school. It should recognise that there is no hierarchy of protected characteristics in the Equality Act and that sometimes different protected characteristics can be in tension as they cannot necessarily be equally protected at all times.

⁴ SIAMS Evaluation Schedule, page 11. Available at

⁵ *Equality Act 2010*. Available at www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2010/15/contents

⁶ *Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and health education 2019*. Available at www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education page 18 paragraph 49.

⁷ The use of this term draws on Dr Jo Sell’s her recent research ‘*Relationships and Sex Education: Giving voice to young people of different faiths and none in regard to faith-sensitive relationships and sex education*’, which is due to be published by UCL.

A CHARTER FOR FAITH SENSITIVE AND INCLUSIVE RELATIONSHIPS EDUCATION, RELATIONSHIPS AND SEX EDUCATION (RSE) AND HEALTH EDUCATION (RSHE)⁸

In *[organisation's name]* we seek to provide Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education (RSHE), which will enable all pupils to flourish.

We commit:

1. **To work in partnership with parents and carers.** This will involve dialogue with parents and carers through all stages of policy development as well as discussing the resources used to teach their children and how they can contribute at home. It must, however, be recognised that the law specifies that what is taught and how it is taught is ultimately a decision for the school.
2. **That RSHE will be delivered professionally and as an identifiable part of PSHE.** It will be led, resourced and reported to parents in the same way as any other subject. There will be a planned programme delivered in a carefully sequenced way. Staff will receive regular training in RSHE and PSHE. Any expert visitors or trainers invited into the school to enhance and supplement the programme will be expected to respect the schools published policy for RSHE.
3. **That RSHE will be delivered in a way that affords dignity and shows respect to all who make up our diverse community.** It will not discriminate against any of the protected characteristics in the Equality Act⁹ and will be sensitive to the faith and beliefs of those in the wider school community. RSHE will seek to explain fairly the tenets and varying interpretations of religious communities on matters of sex and relationships and teach these viewpoints with respect. It will value the importance of faithfulness as the underpinning and backdrop for relationships. It will encourage pupils to develop the skills needed to disagree without being disagreeable, to appreciate the lived experience of other people and to live well together.
4. **That RSHE will seek to build resilience in our pupils to help them form healthy relationships, to keep themselves safe and resist the harmful influence of pornography in all its forms.** It will give pupils opportunities to reflect on values and influences including their peers, the media, the internet, faith and culture that may have shaped their attitudes to gender, relationships and sex. It will promote the development of the wisdom and skills our pupils need to make their own informed decisions.

⁸ RSHE is used to indicate either Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education as determined by the school context since, after consultation with parents and carers primary schools may decide to include elements of sex education in their curriculum.

⁹ The protected characteristics are age, disability, gender reassignment, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation, marriage and civil partnership and pregnancy and maternity.

5. **That RSHE will promote healthy resilient relationships set in the context of character and virtue development.** It will reflect the vision and associated values of the school, promote reverence for the gift of human sexuality and encourage relationships that are hopeful and aspirational. Based on the school's values it will seek to develop character within a moral framework based on virtues such as honesty, integrity, self-control, courage, humility, kindness, forgiveness, generosity and a sense of justice but does not seek to teach only one moral position.
6. **That RSHE will be based on honest and medically accurate information from reliable sources of information, including about the law and legal rights.** It will distinguish between different types of knowledge and opinions so that pupils can learn about their bodies and sexual and reproductive health as appropriate to their age and maturity.
7. **To take a particular care to meet the individual needs of all pupils including those with special needs and disabilities.** It will ensure that lessons and any resources used will be accessible and sensitive to the learning needs of the individual child. We acknowledge the potential vulnerability of pupils who have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and recognise the possibilities and rights of SEND pupils to high quality Relationships and Sex Education.
8. **To seek pupils' views about RSHE so that the teaching can be made relevant to their lives.** It will discuss real life issues relating to the age and stage of pupils, including friendships, families, faith, consent, relationship abuse, exploitation and safe relationships online. This will be carefully targeted and age appropriate based on a teacher judgment about pupil readiness for this information in consultation with parents and carers.