



## DfE Guidance on RSE curriculum planning in England

In September 2020 the Department for Education released new non-statutory guidance for schools and colleges on Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) titled '[Plan your relationships, sex and health curriculum](#)' and '[Teaching about relationships, sex and health](#)'. This latest guidance is to help school leaders plan, develop and implement the new statutory RSE curriculum.

SSAUK and other unfunded, grass-root organisations have worked tirelessly to ensure established safeguarding frameworks are adhered to; we welcome this latest DfE document. Its clear guidance will help school leaders ensure that the PSHE and RSE content they are delivering to their pupils is safeguarding-compliant, protects the wellbeing of all pupils and is respectful of British values.

At SSAUK we have seen and been sent a lot of RSE resources that have deeply concerned us, and concerned the teachers and parents who have contacted us. Much of this content fails to properly safeguard the physical and mental wellbeing of children. We have already produced a [parents' guide to external PSHE and RSE providers](#) covering some of the organisations which have caused us the most concerns, and demonstrated how their content fails to safeguard children appropriately.

We have also produced an [Equality and Diversity Red Flags Guide](#) to enable parents to recognise potential safeguarding concerns in their own child's school policies.

This latest DfE guidance will help parents to challenge potential Red Flag situations in their child's school RSE resources. Parents will now be able to challenge any content which is not robustly evidence-based and credible, and will be able to ask the school to adhere to the DfE guidance.

We have produced this factsheet summarising the most relevant key points in the DfE guidance to assist with this.

This factsheet can be read in conjunction with our guide to the government's statutory guidance on what schools must teach and when: [RSE and the Law in England](#)

## WHAT DOES THE DFE GUIDANCE SAY?

School leaders and teaching staff should:

- when teaching topics involving gender and biological sex, “not reinforce harmful stereotypes, for instance by suggesting that children might be a different gender based on their personality and interests or the clothes they prefer to wear. Resources used in teaching about this topic must be age-appropriate and evidence-based.”
- not work with organisations which produce materials “which suggest that non-conformity to gender stereotypes should be seen as synonymous with having a different gender identity”.
- ensure all content and resources are “age-appropriate and aligned to the developmental stage of the pupils being taught” and take into account the background of the pupils.
- “exercise extreme caution when working with external agencies and proceed only if you have full confidence in the agency, its approach and the resources it uses.”
- when using external agencies, check their materials in advance, conduct a basic online search and check external speakers’ protocols for taking pictures or using personal data.
- ensure all content, resources and external agencies used are impartial and ensure balanced presentation of opposing political views. They must be impartial in line with school’s legal duties (including the Education Act 1996) regarding political impartiality, take reasonable steps to offer a balanced presentation of opposing political views and “forbid the promotion of partisan political views”.
- ensure that all content is “evidence-based and contains robust facts and statistics” and is from a credible source.
- “work together with parents on any decisions regarding your school’s treatment of their child, in line with the school’s safeguarding policy and the statutory guidance on [Working Together to Safeguard Children](#)”.
- create a safe environment for pupils to discuss RSE topics and should consider setting ground rules to discourage children from sharing personal information. Teachers should stop discussions if personal information is shared by pupils in lessons, and then follow up later where needed. Pupils should know that they can always ask for help and that they will be taken seriously.
- not promise confidentiality if a pupil confides something concerning. Staff must always follow the school’s safeguarding policy regarding safeguarding disclosures or concerns.

## WHAT DOES THE DFE GUIDANCE SAY?

- comply with the Equality Act and Public Sector Equality Duty but remember that the curriculum is exempt. “Schools are not required to equally weight all of the protected characteristics within the curriculum”.
- ensure all content and resources are age-appropriate, aligned with developmental stage and take into account the background of the pupils.
- exercise great caution when setting online assignments that children are not accidentally exposed to age inappropriate material such as pornography. Take care, especially at primary, not to expose children to over-sexualised content. Deliver information about safer sex and sexual health in a non-judgmental, factual way. Bear in mind the law and do not condone or encourage illegal activity or illegal drug use. The safety of children is paramount.
- ensure resources are sensitive to the needs and experiences of all pupils and do not provoke distress. “Resources should also be sensitive to pupils’ experiences as some may have already been exposed or at risk of content being taught. You should ensure that resources do not exhibit any content that may provoke distress”. Ensure that all pupils “feel safe and supported in lessons and able to engage with the key messages”.
- ensure all content, resources and external agencies used respect and do not undermine “British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs”.
- “not under any circumstances work with external agencies that take or promote extreme positions or use materials produced by such agencies. Examples of extreme positions include, but are not limited to:...

  - teaching that requirements of English civil or criminal law may be disregarded whether for political or religious reasons or otherwise
  - engaging in or encouraging active or persistent harassment or intimidation of individuals in support of their cause
  - promoting divisive or victim narratives that are harmful to British society...”

- not under any circumstances use the resources of organisations that take extreme political stances on materials including but not limited to “opposition to the right of freedom of speech, freedom of association, freedom of assembly or freedom of religion and conscience” or who fail to “condemn illegal activities done in their name or in support of their cause, particularly violent actions against people or property”.