Influencing the teaching of Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education in Schools

A Toolkit for Parents

Yusuf Patel

www.sreislamic.org

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In September 2020 Relationship Education (RelEd) will become statutory in primary schools and Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) will become statutory in secondary schools.

Parents can and should recognise they are the primary educators of their children, and feel at ease to:

- Approach schools to ask questions about what is currently taught
- Ask what will be taught after September 2020
- And encourage schools to work with parents to meet the needs of their children.

The following document sets out the guidance that schools need to adhere to and what parents can do to shape what is taught.
The Changes to Sex and Relationship Education (SRE)

From September 2020:

- **Relationships Education (RelEd)** will be made a statutory subject in all primary schools.

- Parents will not be allowed to withdraw from this subject.

- If a school decides to teach Sex Education lessons parents will still have the right to withdraw from these lessons.

- **Relationships and Sex Education (RSE)** will be made a statutory subject in all secondary schools.

- Parents will be not be allowed to withdraw from the Relationships Education part of RSE.

- They will be allowed to withdraw from the Sex Education part of RSE.

- In order to withdraw parents will need to make a request to the head teacher.

- If the request is approved the child will be withdrawn until three school terms before his/her sixteenth birthday.

Parental concerns

Parents have a lot of concerns about the lack of clarity in the guidance, specifically about:

- What safeguards prevent a primary school from introducing sex education topics into Relationships Education classes? This is important as this prevents parents from withdrawing from sex education.

- If a school does so, who can parents raise concerns with?

- RSE is effectively two subjects. The sex education aspect, from which parents can withdraw and the relationships education part, from which parents cannot withdraw. The line between the two is not clear, so secondary schools will effectively have to decide what the two subjects contain. This is a recipe for conflict in schools as some schools will decide that the same topics fall under one and not the other, therefore parents in one school will be allowed to withdraw from one topic area, whilst parents in another will not be able to withdraw.
• Parents can make a request to the headteacher who can either approve or reject the request. The government has assured us that the head teacher will approve requests in the majority of cases but have not defined the exceptional reasons why a head teacher can reject a request. Neither has the government explained what a parent who has been refused the request to withdraw can do to appeal this decision. The government has shifted the onus of responsibility to fill in the gaps to schools.

• As we will outline, the government has placed a responsibility on schools to consult and work with parents without defining the process or setting any basic standards for consultation.

These concerns need to be dealt with by the governing body of a school in its policy.
The scope for change

Although RE and RSE are being made statutory subjects from September 2020, schools are being encouraged to start teaching these subjects in September 2019 as part of the early adopters programme (also known as pathfinder schools). It is therefore essential that parents approach schools now as schools will begin planning very soon.

It is important to clarify from the outset that schools are not obligated to use a particular resource, contract an external provider, to teach topics at certain year groups or to teach RE or RSE in any given way (the learning outcomes are included at the end of this toolkit for ease of reference). The statutory guidance makes clear that the government has afforded schools a huge amount of flexibility to decide how to teach these subjects so that they can take account parental views and of the community they serve including the faith background of its pupils.

In the foreword to the Guidance, written by the Secretary of State, it clearly states:

“We are determined that the subjects must be deliverable and give schools flexibility to shape their curriculum according to the needs of their pupils and communities.”

What does the guidance say?

Parents are the primary educators of their children on matters relating to the social, emotional and spiritual development of their children. Schools complement but do not replace this role.

“We are clear that parents and carers are the prime educators for children on many of these matters. Schools complement and reinforce this role, and have told us that they see building on what pupils learn at home as an important part of delivering a good education.”

“The role of parents in the development of their children’s understanding about relationships is vital. Parents are the first teachers of their children. They have the most significant influence in enabling their children to grow and mature and to form healthy relationships.”

Schools must consult parents in determining the policy, which should meet the needs of pupils, parents and the community they serve.

“All schools must have in place a written policy for Relationships Education and 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.”

The policy should include, “how the policy has been produced, and how it will be kept under review, in both cases working with parents”

“All schools must have an up-to-date policy, which is made available to parents and others. Schools must provide a copy of the policy free of charge to anyone who asks for one, and should publish the policy on the school website.”
Schools should show parents the resources

“Schools should also ensure that, when they consult with parents, they provide examples of the resources that they plan to use as this can be reassuring for parents, and enables them to continue the conversations started in class at home.”

Governors must ensure that there is clear information for parents about withdrawal. After September 2020, in primary schools, parents can continue to withdraw their children from sex education. In secondary schools, parents have to ask permission of the headteacher to withdraw their child from sex education and when the child is 15, he or she can make their own decision about attending sex education lessons.

Governing boards should also make sure that, “clear information is provided for parents on the subject content and the right to request that their child is withdrawn”

“All schools should work closely with parents when planning and delivering these subjects. Schools should ensure that parents know what will be taught and when, and clearly communicate the fact that parents have the right to request that their child be withdrawn from some or all of sex education delivered as part of statutory RSE.”

“Parents should be given every opportunity to understand the purpose and content of Relationships Education and RSE. Good communication and opportunities for parents to understand and ask questions about the school’s approach help increase confidence in the curriculum.”

Schools must take into account the age and religious background of pupils when deciding what to teach and which resources to use, this requires schools to work with parents in developing a curriculum which meets the needs of young people and in consultation with their parents and the local community

“Schools must also ensure that their teaching and materials are appropriate having regard to the age and religious backgrounds of their pupils.”

Schools will retain freedom to determine an age-appropriate, developmental curriculum which meets the needs of young people, is developed in consultation with parents and the local community.

Summary of the Guidance

Parents must be integral to the process of designing a curriculum for RE and RSE. Schools must bring in parents at the very start of the process, rather than at the end. They must be a part of the process.

Schools may not be well versed in these changes or what is required, parents must feel confident to remind schools, gently, of their obligations.
LGBT Education

The government has clarified that primary schools are not required to cover LGBT content in primary schools.

Primary schools are enabled and encouraged to cover LGBT content if they consider it age appropriate to do so, but there is no specific requirement for this. 

What are you trying to achieve?

It’s very important that you are clear about what you are aiming to achieve.

- Do you want to ensure that the materials used do not contain inappropriate imagery?
- Do you want to delay certain topics to much later year groups when it is more age appropriate?
- Do you want to prevent the school from bringing in external organisations that will undermine your values?
- Do you want to create an equal partnership when you advise and support the school to choose a programme that fully meets the needs of parents?

What you want to achieve may be influenced by the school’s previous track record in working with parents, your relationship with the school, how the school responds to your initial interactions etc. Do aim high but also be realistic.

Schools need to adapt how they teach RE and RSE to reflect the age and faith background of pupils, as well as working closely with parents in planning and delivering these subjects.

That is why when you approach schools you should be confident that you are not asking for special treatment, you just want to work with the school in planning and delivering these subjects in a way that takes into account the age and religious background of your children, its pupils.

The art of influencing

If you think about any situation in which you have convinced someone to do something they may not have wanted to do, what were the key factors that helped you influence the decisions of that person?

The key to influencing is developing a strong, positive relationship. If you only contact the school when they get something wrong, this will undoubtedly colour the way the school sees you. They’ll probably see you as a troublemaker. If you commend the school on things it does well, they are more likely to value your opinion when you suggest a different way of doing something.

Being a part of the school also helps, whether that is as part of the Parent Teacher Association, as a governor or as a volunteer.
What were the key factors in influencing their decision?

1. Sometimes what’s more important than what you say is how you say it. Remember that we need to aim for positive engagement with schools and avoid conflict. That means thanking the school for the education they are providing to your child.

2. Relationship is key, try and invest in building a relationship with the school. Whether that is by becoming a governor or volunteering at the school. The better the relationship and the more positive your relationship is, the more your views will be listened to.

Your initial approach to the head teacher needs to be constructive, positive and polite. You are a parent with a child or children at the school and you have heard about the changes to RE (primary) and RSE (secondary),

You recognise that the school has to implement these changes by September 2020.

You also recognise that not only does the school have to consult parents but that involving parents at the earliest stages ensures that the chances for conflict are minimised.

Conflict between parents and the school does not benefit anyone so has to be avoided.

You should offer your services to the school to help feed into the process of planning and delivery.

At this stage you do not need to go into any other detail unless the head teacher asks for your concerns or comments.

Things to look out for

In primary schools, parents are able to withdraw from Sex education (SE), which remains a non-statutory subject, whilst RelEd while become a statutory subject from 1st September 2020. As a parent you are allowed to withdraw from SE but not RelEd. Due to the fact that the government has not clarified the difference between the two, it is important that parents ask primary schools how they are making the distinction clear to parents.

In Secondary schools, RSE will become a statutory subject from September 2020. As a parent you will be able to withdraw (by requesting the head teacher) from the sex education component of RSE but not the relationships part. As in primary school, the government has not separated the teaching of sex from relationships education, so parents will need to ask schools how they are making that distinction for the purposes of facilitating the parental request to withdraw.
Questions to ask Schools

Which organisations will be advising the school?

The type of organisation that advises a school will determine the types of materials a school uses. There are organisations with a track record of providing materials which parents have found to be inappropriate, subjecting children to, too much too soon.


(This is not an exhaustive list, as this is a lucrative, burgeoning market we believe statutory Relationships and Sex Education will usher in a batch of organisations wishing to capitalise on this new opportunity). If an organisation is a member of the Sex Education Forum (SEF), that is a red flag. SEF have been at the forefront of calling for statutory sex education for many years.

We would say as a safeguard, that it would be best if there were no external organisations involved in advising on resources or delivering the teaching.

What resources will be used?

Ask about the resources the school is considering but ensure nothing is purchased until parents are asked for their views as part of the consultation process.

How will the school meaningfully consult parents?

We should expect the school to undertake a meaningful consultation of parents. The school should do more than just being shown the resources expecting parents to rubber stamp them.

A consultation can be a tick box exercise or it can be an opportunity for parents to raise their views and concerns and for the school to be open to taking those views on board.

You need to encourage the school to create a clear and transparent consultation process so that all steps in the process are clearly laid down and not ad hoc.

The consultation process must clearly set out the pivotal role of parents in feeding into the planning and delivery of these subjects.
The key to achieving long term change

1. **Persistence** – If you want to achieve change in schools, as anywhere else you have to be persistence in the face of opposition.

2. **Long term focus** – You cannot change things overnight. It may take weeks or months. The school is not going anywhere. Are you going to stick to your guns when you get what you need or close enough to it?

3. **Unity** - parents need to stick together and not allow the school to play parents off against one another.

4. **Wide buy in** – You get enough parents who agree with you to create an impact

5. **Clear goal** - What are you trying to achieve? Is every one clear on what you are trying to achieve throughout the fight.

Often writing down your goals and getting others signed up to them can help everyone stay on message.

It's very important to be clear on what you're trying to achieve, you should aim high but depending on the circumstances you may not be able to achieve all the things you want. But know this. By interacting with the school you will be able to achieve much more than if you don’t engage with the school.

We also need to make it clear that we shouldn't have a narrow focus.

We believe that any relationship outside of marriage between a man and a woman is invalid.

Whether that be pre-marital or extra-marital sexual relationships between a man a woman or sexual relationships between a man and a man or a woman and a woman.

We must make it clear that we do believe that children need to taught to respect everybody whoever they are but must not be prematurely sexualised by introducing them to the concept of sexual relationships.
Let’s summarise the steps you should take today in your child’s school

1. **Understand** the changes and what the guidance sets out for schools to engage with parents, to involve parents in the planning and delivery, as well as to take into account the age and religious background of pupils.

2. **Find out how the school currently teaches Sex and Relationships Education**, this will give you an understanding of current practice.

3. **Plan your first positive interaction with the head teacher**. Offer your services to the head teacher. Remember to be polite, ask questions and be constructive and not critical or argumentative.

4. **Ask questions** about the planning for RE or RSE,
   - which outside agencies are being used to advise the school,
   - their timetable for planning for these new subjects,
   - how parents are going to be meaningfully consulted.

You could also address the letter to the governing board or write a separate letter to them.

The 2019 edition of the governance handbook sets out the requirement for governing boards to meaningfully engage parents.

Governing boards in local authority, maintained schools (not academies and free schools) also have a statutory duty to show how the views of parents have influenced their decision making.

5. **Work with other parents**, so that the parental voice is heard by the school.

   We will be setting up parental groups in each area to provide support following these interactions, as we envisage that most schools will respond positively whilst a small minority may not respond positively.

   We will support you to get your points heard.

To join a local group send an email with your name, local area and phone number to yusuf@sreislamic.org
By the end of primary school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families and people who care for me</th>
<th>Pupils should know</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• that families are important for children growing up because they can give love, security and stability.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the characteristics of healthy family life, commitment to each other, including in times of difficulty, protection and care for children and other family members, the importance of spending time together and sharing each other’s lives.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• that others’ families, either in school or in the wider world, sometimes look different from their family, but that they should respect those differences and know that other children’s families are also characterised by love and care for them.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• that stable, caring relationships, which may be of different types, are at the heart of happy families, and are important for children’s security as they grow up.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• that marriage/civil partnership represents a formal and legally recognised commitment of two people to each other which is intended to be lifelong.</td>
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<td>• how to recognise if family relationships are making them feel unhappy or unsafe, and how to seek help or advice from others if needed.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Caring friendships</th>
<th>Pupils should know</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• how important friendships are in making us feel happy and secure, and how people choose and make friends.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• the characteristics of friendships, including mutual respect, truthfulness, trustworthiness, loyalty, trust, sharing interests and experiences and support with problems and difficulties.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• that healthy friendships are positive and welcoming towards others, and do not make others feel lonely or excluded.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• that most friendships have ups and downs, and that these can often be worked through so that the friendship is repaired or even strengthened, and that resorting to violence is never right.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• how to recognise who to trust and who not to trust, how to judge when a friendship is making them feel unhappy or uncomfortable, how to manage these situations and how to seek help or advice from others, if needed.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Respectful relationships

Pupils should know

- the importance of respecting others, even when they are very different from them (for example, physically, in character, personality or backgrounds), or make different choices or have different preferences or beliefs.
- the conventions of courtesy and manners.
- the importance of self-respect and how this links to their own happiness.
- that in school and in wider society they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show due respect to others, including those in positions of authority.
- about different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders (primarily reporting bullying to an adult) and how to get help.
- what a stereotype is, and how stereotypes can be unfair, negative or destructive.
- the importance of permission-seeking and giving in relationships with friends, peers and adults.

Being safe

Pupils should know

- what sorts of boundaries are appropriate in friendships with peers and others (including in a digital context).
- about the concept of privacy and the implications of it for both children and adults; including that it is not always right to keep secrets if they relate to being safe.
- that each person’s body belongs to them, and the differences between appropriate and inappropriate or unsafe physical, and other, contact.
- how to respond safely and appropriately to adults they may encounter who they do not know.
- how to ask for advice or help for self and for others, and to keep trying until they are heard, including having the vocabulary and confidence to report concerns or abuse.
- where to get advice from e.g. family, school and/or other sources.

National curriculum for science

Maintained schools are required to teach the national curriculum for science. At key stages 1 and 2 this includes teaching about the main external body parts and changes to the human body as it grows from birth to old age, including puberty. There is no right to withdraw from the national curriculum.
By the end of secondary school:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Families</th>
<th>Pupils should know</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• that there are different types of committed, stable relationships.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• how these relationships might contribute to human happiness and their importance for bringing up children.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• what marriage and civil partnerships are, including their legal status e.g. that marriage and civil partnerships carry legal rights and protections not available to couples who are cohabiting or who have married, for example, in an unregistered religious ceremony.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• why marriage is an important relationship choice for many couples and why it must be freely entered into.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• the characteristics and legal status of other types of long-term relationships.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• the roles and responsibilities of parents with respect to the raising of children.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• how to: determine whether peers, adults or sources of information are trustworthy, judge when a family, friend, intimate or other relationships is unsafe (and to recognise this in others’ relationships); and, how to seek help or advice, including reporting concerns about others, if needed.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Respectful relationships, including friendships</th>
<th>Pupils should know.</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• the characteristics of positive and healthy friendships (both on and offline) including: trust, respect, honesty, boundaries, privacy, consent and the management of conflict, reconciliation and ending relationships. This includes different (non-sexual) types of relationship.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• how stereotypes, in particular stereotypes based on sex, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation or disability, can cause damage (e.g. how they might normalise non-consensual behaviour or encourage prejudice).</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• that in school and in wider society they can expect to be treated with respect by others, and that in turn they should show due tolerance and respect to others and others’ beliefs, including people in positions of authority.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• about different types of bullying (including cyberbullying), the impact of bullying, responsibilities of bystanders to report bullying and how and where to get help.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• that some types of behaviour within relationships are criminal, including violent behaviour and coercive control.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• what constitutes sexual harassment and sexual violence and why these are always unacceptable.</td>
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<td>• the legal rights and responsibilities regarding equality (particularly with reference to the protected characteristics as defined in the Equality Act 2010) and that everyone is unique and equal.</td>
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<tr>
<th>Online and media</th>
<th>Pupils should know</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• their rights, responsibilities and opportunities online, including that the same expectations of behaviour apply online and offline.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• about online risks, including that any material someone provides to another has the potential to be shared online and the difficulty of removing potentially compromising material placed online.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• not to provide material to others that they would not want shared further and not to share personal material which is sent to them.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• what to do and where to get support to report material or manage issues online.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• the impact of viewing harmful content.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• that specifically sexually explicit material often presents a distorted picture of sexual behaviours, can damage the way people see themselves in relation to others and negatively affect how they behave towards sexual partners.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• that sharing and viewing indecent images of children (including those created by children) is against the law.</td>
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<td>• how information and data is generated, collected, shared and used online.</td>
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### Relationships and Sex Education

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Being safe</th>
<th>Pupils should know</th>
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<td></td>
<td>• the concepts of, and laws relating to, sexual consent, sexual exploitation, abuse, grooming, coercion, harassment and domestic abuse and how these can affect current and future relationships.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• how people can actively communicate and recognise consent from others, including sexual consent, and how and when consent can be withdrawn (on and offline).</td>
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<tr>
<th>Intimate and sexual relationships, including sexual health</th>
<th>Pupils should know</th>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• how to recognise the characteristics and positive aspects of healthy one-to-one intimate relationships, which include mutual respect, consent, loyalty, trust, shared interests and outlook, sex and friendship.</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• that all aspects of health can be affected by choices they make in sex and relationships, positively or negatively, e.g. physical, emotional, mental, sexual and reproductive health and wellbeing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• the facts about reproductive health, including fertility and the potential impact of lifestyle on fertility for men and women.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• that there are a range of strategies for identifying and managing sexual pressure, including understanding peer pressure, resisting pressure and not pressurising others.</td>
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<td>• that they have a choice to delay sex or to enjoy intimacy without sex.</td>
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<td>• the facts about the full range of contraceptive choices and options available.</td>
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<td>• the facts around pregnancy including miscarriage.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• that there are choices in relation to pregnancy (with medically and legally accurate, impartial information on all options, including keeping the baby, adoption, abortion and where to get further help).</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• how the different sexually transmitted infections (STIs), including HIV/AIDS, are transmitted, how risk can be reduced through safer sex (including through condom use) and the importance of and facts about testing.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• how prevalence of some STIs, the impact they can have on those who contract them and key facts about treatment.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• how the use of alcohol and drugs can lead to risky sexual behaviour.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>• how to get further advice, including how and where to access confidential sexual and reproductive health advice and treatment.</td>
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**National curriculum for science**

Maintained schools are also required to teach the national curriculum for science. At key stage 3 and 4 this includes teaching about reproduction in humans, for example the structure and function of the male and female reproductive systems, menstrual cycles, gametes, fertilisation, gestation, birth and HIV/AIDS. There continues to be no right of withdrawal from any part of the national curriculum.
Endnotes

i Page 4, Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education Draft statutory guidance for governing bodies, proprietors, head teachers, principals, senior leadership teams, teachers, February 2019

ii Page 4, ibid

iii Page 17, ibid

iv Page 11, ibid

v Ibid

vi Page 12, ibid

vii Page 11, ibid

viii Page 13, ibid

ix Page 16, ibid

x Page 17, ibid

xi Ibid

xii Page 24, ibid


xiv 12 Marriage in England and Wales is available to both opposite sex and same sex couples. The Marriage (Same Sex Couples) Act 2013 extended marriage to same sex couples in England and Wales. The ceremony through which a couple get married may be civil or religious.