

Relationship Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education

FAQs for CofE Schools

There is a glossary of terms at the end of the FAQs.

Where a publication is referred to in the FAQs an electronic link to that document has been included.

1. Parents are questioning why as a CofE school we are teaching young children about all this 'stuff'.

The DfE's statutory guidance makes reference to "schools with a religious character may teach the distinctive faith perspective on relationships, and balanced debate may take place about issues that are seen as contentious." [page 12]. The DBE encourages CofE schools to reflect its own vision and associated values across its curriculum more broadly. Foundation governors in schools will need to support school leaders in this endeavour.

The CofE Education Office in its [Principles and Charter for RHSE](#) states:

"CofE schools should ensure that their RSHE curriculum protects, informs and nurtures all pupils. It should clearly differentiate between factual teaching (biology... law... marriage...) and moral teaching about relationship and values..."

Whatever an individual's feelings may be, the DBE holds the view that Church schools are required by law to be preparing pupils for life in a pluralistic British society, where it is possible to identify in different ways with respect to gender and sexuality and to express that in relationships. As state funded schools, we must abide by this law. To do this well means talking about equality issues with our children and young people.

2. Will all CofE schools in the diocese be required to deliver sex education?

The DBE does not control what individual Church of England schools teach. Schools are required to teach in line with statutory guidance. There are different requirements for primary schools and secondary schools, set out below:

Secondary schools – Relationship and Sex Education is compulsory in all secondary schools. The DfE guidance is clear in the content which schools are required to deliver within their curriculum. Parents have a right to withdraw their children from sex education but not relationship education.

Primary schools – Sex education is not compulsory in primary schools, however many primary schools provide a programme of sex education, and typically this is part of preparing Year 6 children in their transition to secondary school. Page 23 of the DfE

Guidance states *“The Department continues to recommend therefore that all primary schools should have a sex education programme tailored to the age and the physical and emotional maturity of the pupils.”* Parents have a right to withdraw their children from sex education but not relationship education.

3. Relationships, health and sex education should be taught within the home not the classroom, I don't want my child in these lessons.

From September 2020, primary schools are required to teach relationship education and secondary schools are required to teach relationship and sex education. Schools are advised to consult with parents about how they are going to meet these legal requirements. Schools will not be promoting a particular viewpoint but will be giving pupils an opportunity to consider different types of families, friendships and relationships. Parents have a right to withdraw their children from sex education (with the exception of that which is covered during science lessons), but there is no right of withdrawal from relationship education.

4. How will schools teach about same sex couples having children?

The DfE's statutory guidance is very clear that schools must be sensitive to the different forms families can take including single parent families, LGBTQI parents, families headed by grandparents, adoptive parents, foster parents / carers and or be blended families. [Page 19 of the DfE guidance]. It is also clear that by the end of primary school pupils know about marriage which includes same sex marriage.

Schools should use their knowledge of the pupils and their circumstances to ensure the teaching is sensitive and well judged.

5. The material for RSE seems to be coming from organisations promoting same sex relationships how can this be right?

The [DfE's Relationship Education, Relationships and Sex Education \(RSE\) and Health Education \(RSHE\) guidance](#) does not promote one viewpoint over another; its focus is on equality. It's the responsibility of individual schools which resources they use and organisations they may work with to support them in their teaching.

6. Why should a C of E school teach about same sex relationships when the Bible does not teach this?

The Bible does teach about relationships and in the 21st Century it is recognised that same sex relationships are one of these relationships. The Bible teaches us that everyone is made in God's image and so demands our respect. There are different views about the Bible's teaching in relation to human sexuality. The DBE understands that this presents a tension and that there is an ongoing debate about how Christian ethics are applied. However, the Church of England teaches that gay people are welcome in Church.

Our schools are teaching children about the world around them, preparing them for life in Britain where society is diverse and they are going to meet different people as they grow up.

Our aspiration is that children can engage critically with a breadth of viewpoints in a way that demonstrates respect for the individuals who hold them. We recognise that people have different views and we respect your view and those of people from other faith backgrounds, or of no faith.

The [Church of England's Vision for Education](#), 'Deeply Christian, Serving the Common Good' states this:

"Healthy religious plurality recognizes deep differences in religion, belief and worldview, understands the history that has led to the present situation, and creates settings where there can be ongoing negotiation in which the diversity of voices is taken seriously.

In addition the statutory guidance is very clear that children should be taught about different types of relationships, with same sex relationships being one of them."

7. Islam has no space for homosexuality why are you teaching about it?

Teaching the content outlined in the DfE guidance is statutory, it is underpinned by the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) and schools are empowered to deliver a curriculum that is age, stage and context appropriate. Within Islam, as with all religions and beliefs, there are a range of views regarding homosexuality and there are several Islamic organisations which support gay Muslims.

8. A staff member has an issue with teaching about the Equality Act – what do I do?

As with anything relating to staff you should always take appropriate HR advice. The Equality Act protects people from discrimination and harassment. It places a duty on public authorities and educational facilities including local-authority-maintained schools; academies and free schools; local authorities; non-maintained special schools; and independent schools, to be proactive in considering the need to address inequalities. It requires a public authority to have due regards to the need to:

- eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation
- advance equality of opportunity between those who share a relevant 'protected characteristic' (including sexual orientation) and those who do not and
- foster good relations between those who share such a protected characteristic and those who do not.

The DBE expects all schools to have a curriculum which meets the requirement of the law - in this case as given in the [Equality Act \(2010\)](#) - to prepare pupils for life in modern Britain. This means having a curriculum which teaches about difference in a positive way, whether about disability, gender assignment, or LGBTQI matters. School staff cannot 'opt out' of teaching about the Act through the statutory RSE curriculum. The DBE highlights the importance of staff meetings in introducing the RSE curriculum and will ensure that there is a good understanding about what is being taught when and why. The DBE recommends that schools ensure they include LSAs, TAs etc in staff meetings / communications about the requirements of the RSE guidance so that any queries can be raised before teaching commences.

9. What do I do if a staff member does not agree with same sex relationships and does not want to teach about it?

As with anything relating to staff who should always take appropriate HR advice, including being clear on the definitions of protected characteristics. In our schools we will find people with a range of views about these matters. None of this counters the school's aims or ethos. However, expressing hatred, hostility or acting in ways to demean others is unacceptable.

The DBE understands and respects that not everyone agreed with this. However, as a school you are required to prepare children for life in modern Britain, and in the UK it is legally accepted that individuals are, for example, gay, transgender or bisexual, and that such individuals have rights that are upheld in British law. Schools are preparing children to meet people who will be different from themselves, where society is diverse. They need to be able to understand the law of the land they live in.

In the [Teacher Standards](#), it talks about upholding public trust in the profession and maintaining high standards of ethics and behaviour, within and outside school. This is done by showing tolerance of and respect for the rights of others, not undermining fundamental British values, including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect, and having tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs, ensuring that personal beliefs are not expressed in ways which exploit pupils' vulnerability or might lead them to break the law.

In some instances, teachers are able to withdraw from RE, but this is not RE and so teachers don't have the right to withdraw from teaching this.

10. Why are you not condemning people that think same sex relationships are wrong?

The Church of England teaches that all are welcome. [LDBE's own vision statement](#) reflects this by stating that our aspiration for our schools is that they are 'scandalously inclusive'. We must make sure our schools welcome and include all, following the example of hospitality expressed by a loving God. This welcome extends to those that hold different opinions on relationships.

11. How do we approach all the nuances of gender identity?

Many of us are on a journey of understanding gender identity and associated terms. The ['Flourishing for All: Anti-Bullying Guidance for Church of England Schools \(Draft for Consultation July 2024\)'](#) document provides a useful glossary of terms.

12. How should I work with my local church leaders on this?

The DBE recognises that there are a range of views within the Church on this subject but would encourage school leaders not to assume viewpoints and to have open conversations with church leaders. The DBE's vision for CofE schools in the diocese provides useful local supporting context.

The DBE recommends that schools ensure their church leaders are fully versed in the requirement of the statutory guidance and that there is a partnership approach to meeting

the statutory requirement within the church school context. Church leaders should be involved in consultation meeting(s).

Head Teachers need the understanding and the support of the Governing Board and the local church and clergy to deliver this element of the curriculum. If this is difficult then the Diocesan Director of Education is available to support further discussion.

13. Does the DBE recommend a particular resource to support this work?

The DBE does not recommend any single resource or organisation to support schools with the delivery of this curriculum. The DBE encourages schools to consider the RSE statutory guidance [page 18] which highlights the importance of ensuring any teaching delivery from resources and/or organisations fits with the schools planned programme and published policy and in line with the school's Christian character.

The DBE will continue to facilitate opportunities for schools to share experiences of using different resources and engaging with different organisations to support the delivery of this statutory requirement.

14. How does the RSE guidance link to the [SIAMS schedule](#)?

The RSE Guidance refers to the SIAMS schedule in particular Strand 5 'Dignity and Respect.' The [CofE Charter](#) for RSHE states:

"RSHE should ensure 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 others."

15. Do teachers have to share their personal experiences and lifestyle?

Teachers are not asked to share any of their personal experiences or lifestyle.

However, in secondary schools in particular, there may be an appropriate context where a teacher might share something from their personal experience. This sharing would be within their professional judgment and perhaps be part of general conversations in school life, rather than be within the curriculum. The DBE encourages staff and senior leaders to discuss possible scenarios when this might happen.

16. What roles do Foundation Governors and other governors have with this work?

Foundation governors should be involved in the development of the school's RSHE Policy and consider the policy in light of the school's distinctly Christian vision, the [CofE Vision for Education](#) and the [DBE's Vision](#).

17. Will the DBE be supporting us in our consultation meetings with parents?

The DBE encourages schools to meet with their local clergy prior to the consultation meetings with parents. The DBE does not have capacity to support schools with their individual meetings but can advise school leaders/governors when planning a meeting.

Glossary of Terms

- **Bisexual** -Refers to a person who has an emotional and/or sexual orientation towards people of more than one gender.
- **CofE** – Church of England
- **DBE /LDBE** – Diocesan Board of Education / Leicester Diocesan Board of Education
- **Gay** - Refers to a man who has an emotional, romantic and/or sexual attraction towards men. Also a generic term for lesbian and gay sexuality- some women define themselves as gay rather than lesbian.
- **LGBTQI** - Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer and intersex
- **LSA's** - Learning Support Advisers
- **DfE** – Department for Education
- **RE** – Religious Education, usually referred to as RS religious studies at secondary school
- **RSE** – Relationship and Sex Education
- **RHSE** – Relationship, Health and Sex Education
- **SIAMS** – An acronym for the Statutory (section 48) Inspection of Anglican and Methodist Schools
- **TA's** – Teaching Assistants
- **Transgender** in particular:
 - Transgender man*
A term used to describe someone who is assigned female at birth but identifies as a man. This may be shortened to trans man, or FTM, an abbreviation for female-to-male.
 - Transgender woman*
A term used to describe someone who is assigned male at birth but identifies as a woman. This may be shortened to trans woman, or MTF, an abbreviation for male-to-female.