

RSE CURRICULUM COMPROMISES

INTRODUCTION

The [DfE Guidance](#) for RSE, Relationships Education and Health Education states:

- *In all schools, when teaching these subjects, the religious background of all pupils must be taken into account when planning teaching, so that the topics that are included in the core content in this guidance are appropriately handled. Schools must ensure they comply with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, under which religion or belief are amongst the protected characteristics (para 20)*
- *Provisions within the Equality Act allow schools to take positive action, where it can be shown that it is proportionate, to deal with particular disadvantages affecting one group because of a protected characteristic. This should be taken into consideration in designing and teaching these subjects. (para 29)*
- *that schools have a duty to work closely with parents when planning and delivering these subjects Schools should ensure that parents know what will be taught and when' (para 41).*

The guidance therefore requires schools to consider the needs of different groups and to make provisions to enable all pupils to access the learning required in Relationships Education and Health Education curricula.

The compromises which might be agreed to enable children to participate fall into two main categories: provision and curriculum content.

COMPROMISING ON PROVISION

Schools may offer a variety of methods of provision, in order to increase the comfort levels of the students and their families. The following are some examples to prompt creative solutions in each school as it addresses the needs of its own community.

Single Sex Groups – It is best practice to offer learning in mixed classes, where pupils are able to choose smaller discussion groups when sensitive issues are being discussed. This enables pupils to respect the views of others and empathise with the views and concerns of all their classmates. Single sex groups may be offered in cases where, for example discussion of private body parts in mixed company is seen as undesirable. Lessons from the Units of works where body parts will be discussed should be highlighted.

Same Sex Teacher – It is best practice in primary schools that children are taught by their own class teacher, who know them and their families well and who can predict and mitigate concerns the children have. However, some parents may feel more comfortable if their children are taught by a teacher of the same sex as themselves to reduce discomfort when talking about private body parts, puberty or sexual intercourse in mixed company.

Religion or Culture focused groups – It is best practice that children of different cultural and religious backgrounds are taught together so that children hear the differing views and perspectives of their classmates and learn skills of respectful listening, empathy and respect. However in some cases schools may offer culture or religion specific groups to perhaps offer a programme tailored to the needs of the group, without reducing the content or coverage of lessons for their classmates. For examples a group of Gypsy Roma Traveller pupils might be taught in a small probably single sex group, using resources which reflect GRT culture.

COMPROMISING ON CURRICULUM CONTENT

In the Primary Personal Development Programme, Learning Objectives are highlighted as being link to statutory requirements. Where a Learning objective is bold it is linked to an end of Key Stage 2 statement in either Relationships Education or Health Education. For example, in Relationships and Sex Education 1 (RS1) the following learning objectives are included:

- 1. To recognise the main external parts of the bodies of humans, including names for sexual parts. (BS)**
2. To describe what their bodies can do.
- 3. To understand that they have responsibility for their body's actions and that their body belongs to them (BS)**
- 4. To know how to keep themselves clean. (HP)**
- 5. To understand the importance of basic hygiene practices, e.g. washing hands, using a tissue, and how these prevent the spread of disease. (HP)**
6. To understand what they have learned and be able to share it with others.

Learning Objectives 2. and 6. are not statutory and the school may choose whether or not they will be taught. If a school chooses to cover these topics, all children will be expected to participate, there is no right for parents to withdraw their child from the school's chosen curriculum.

Learning Objective 1 is more contentious. It is bold and linked to the statutory requirements in Relationships Education, Being Safe.

This statement is a description of what a pupil should be able to do by the end of KS2. There is therefore some flexibility about how a child progresses towards that end of key stage goal, supported by steps of learning which consolidate and then build on prior knowledge. It is the interpretation of which steps are taken when, which allows for some flexibility.

Scientific names for sexual body parts

Pupils should know how to report concerns or abuse, and the vocabulary and confidence needed to do so. (page 22)

Best practice as described by a variety of organisations (e.g. NSPCC and Barnardo's) is to give children words for their external sexual body parts as soon as possible in EYFS or KS1. This early introduction reduces embarrassment about the words, enables children to build confidence in naming their body parts to trusted adults and reduces the likelihood that children will consider their bodies to be shameful or 'dirty'. All of these outcomes are protective against child abuse and make it more likely that children will seek help if they need it.

There are a variety of groups who feel that teaching children the scientific/doctor words for their body parts is undesirable. Some of these views stem from a feeling that naming the sexual parts and acknowledging their existence encourages the early sexualisation of children, or is inappropriate outside the home or in mixed groups.

When considering compromise arrangements, schools might consider developing the skills of communicating confidently without actually naming the sexual parts, for example using the NSPCC 'PANTS' rule. Schools may compromise by using a generic phrase such as 'private parts' in EYFS and possibly KS1, only introducing names of external parts in Y3/4.

The progression of learning is therefore maintained. In EYFS/KS1 the focus is when and how to tell, in Y3/4 the focus is external sexual parts, in Y5/6 the focus moves to internal sexual parts as the detail of puberty is taught.

Introduction of puberty

Puberty including menstruation should be covered in Health Education and should, as far as possible, be addressed before onset. This should ensure male and female pupils are prepared for changes they and their peers will experience. (para 88)

Pupils should know key facts about puberty and the changing adolescent body, particularly from age 9 through to age 11, including physical and emotional changes.

Pupils should know about menstrual wellbeing including the key facts about the menstrual cycle.

In the PDP the main teaching about puberty and managing it is covered in Relationships and Sex 5 (RS5). This learning is then reviewed in RS6, consolidating and developing the knowledge and confidence of the children. There is however an introduction to puberty in RS3 (Activity 2.1). This content is included in order to provide an opportunity to introduce the concept of puberty, i.e. that a child's body has to go through a process of change in order to become an adult body. The age of onset of puberty ranges from 8-14 years. Therefore there may be children in Year 3 who are on the verge of puberty or when onset has begun.

Although offering this introductory step is best practice, to ensure all children learn something about puberty before it happens to them, schools may consider compromising on the inclusion of puberty at Y3/4.

Sex Education

Sex Education is specifically teaching about '*how a baby is conceived and born*'. This area of RSE in primary schools is not statutory, but it continues to be recommended (para 67), although parents have the right to withdraw their children from sex education (para 45).

In the PDP all elements of the programme which are 'sex education' are highlighted in the 'points to note' column of RS4 and RS6 where the only sex education content appears.

In RS4 the learning objective relating to sex education is:

To understand that babies begin when a male seed and female egg join together.

In RS6 the learning objective relating to sex education is:

To know about different ways babies are conceived and born, including sexual reproduction and sexual intercourse.

Schools may decide not to offer the learning in RS4. Schools may decide that they will not offer sex education at all if the majority of parents do not want their children to receive it. Some schools may continue to offer sex education even if only a small number of parents wish their children to receive it, whilst upholding and respecting the right of other families to withdraw their children from this element.

The parents' right to withdraw their child from sex education must be clearly stated in the school policy and in other communications about the way the curriculum is organised *e.g. letters, leaflets, website*.