

## Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) – Frequently asked questions for schools and settings

### What is RSE?

We want education to help our children to develop as **healthy, confident individuals**, ready for the next chapter in their life after school.

The **Curriculum for Wales** will begin to be rolled out in schools from September 2022. It has a key role to play in **helping children and young people navigate the world safely**.

‘Sex and Relationships Education’ (SRE) will change to ‘Relationships and Sexuality Education’ (RSE) in the new curriculum. The change of title is deliberate – with a renewed focus on Relationships.

Parents have a central role to play in supporting their children. There is also a crucial role for schools - especially in a world where there is so much inaccurate and misleading information and harmful materials, circulating online. RSE plays an important role for the **safeguarding** and **protection** of all learners in Wales.

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) will be a **mandatory** element of the Curriculum for Wales – so that every child has a right to access the full curriculum. It includes learning on anti bullying, violence against woman and online safety as part of a whole school approach.

### What will Primary school age children be taught?

The aim is to gradually build learners knowledge, skills and values as they develop emphasising the social and emotional aspects of relationships. Schools are legally required to ensure that learning is developmentally appropriate for every learner. That means they must not be exposed to learning they’re not ready for.

Education about relationships in early development is required to focus on building healthy relationships and self-esteem by encouraging learners to value themselves; recognise and communicate their feelings and form friendships.

For example, at age 5, children currently in the Foundation Phase learn about relationships with parents, family and friends - not romantic relationships. This will be mirrored in the new curriculum.

Up until the end of primary school children will learn:

- Developing empathy and kindness through positive interactions.
- Promoting awareness that there are different types of families and relationships – and everyone is unique.
- Learning how human beings change as they grow.
- Recognising the importance of looking after yourself and personal hygiene.
- Learning the right words for all body parts.
- Knowing the benefits of asking for help and who to ask for help.
- Realising that everyone has a right to privacy and to understand the general idea of consent in everyday dealings with others.
- Being able to interact with others in a way that is fair and respectful to all.

By the end of primary school, in line with what happens currently, we would expect most learners to have learned about reproduction. We expect schools to handle this very sensitively and only when learners are ready.

### **Is the Welsh Government continuing to roll out mandatory RSE?**

Yes, the Welsh Government will continue with the roll out of RSE.

RSE has a positive and empowering role in learners' education and plays a vital role in supporting them to be healthy and confident individuals.

Changes to technology and society mean that now more than ever learners need help and protection. RSE is about keeping children and young people healthy and safe: supporting them to develop knowledge, skills and behaviours that will assist in protecting them throughout their lives and improve their well-being.

RSE helps:

- learners to become healthy, confident individuals who form positive relationships based on mutual trust and respect and are building their mental and emotional well-being by developing confidence, resilience and empathy;
- schools respond to a wide range of issues children face; and
- ensure learners have access to a wide range of support and advice.

### **How do I know what my school will be teaching in RSE?**

It is a legislative requirement that RSE must be **developmentally appropriate** for learners and this includes all materials and resources and manner of teaching. RSE is also legally required to be objective, critical and pluralistic: meaning schools and settings must provide factual information and on questions of values, a range of views on a given subject, commonly held within society.

The RSE Code sets out learning at developmentally appropriate phases. It has been published to give parents and carers clarity and transparency about what their children will learn and when. This helps parents and carers see exactly what schools

are required by law to include in RSE. You can access it here: [Cross-cutting themes for designing your curriculum - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

**What happens if a parent does not think the RSE offer complies with the Code? If they feel it is not done in a developmentally appropriate or sensitive way?**

The Curriculum for Wales guidance is clear that when a school designs its curriculum, it should involve learners, parents, carers, partner agencies and the local community. This is an important means of ensuring the curriculum meets learners' needs and is authentic to their context within the national framework.

Communicating effectively with parents and carers on an ongoing basis is an important way to foster positive relationships in order to engage them in purposeful and meaningful dialogue. When undertaken well, this can help aid learner progression by helping parents and carers to understand how they can support learning within and outside the school environment. Schools' curricula should also recognise and reflect the needs and contexts of the communities within and beyond the school.

If parents have any concerns, then they should discuss this with the school and head teacher in the first instance. If they remain unhappy, they can raise the matter with the school's governing body.

Schools are required to have in place a complaints process pursuant to section 29 of the Education Act 2002 for dealing with complaints relating to the school.

If the parent still remains unhappy, parents can raise the matter with the local authority.

After exhausting the local complaints process then a complaint can be made to the Welsh Ministers under Part 2 of the School Standards and Organisation (Wales) Act 2013 (SSO Act). A complaint may be made if the complainant believes the prescribed ground for intervention are made out. Such matters are very fact dependent, but it is likely that the most relevant ground will be GROUND 6: the governing body or head teacher has acted, or is proposing to act, unreasonably in the exercise of any of its or his or her functions under the Education Acts.

The Welsh Ministers have their powers of direction under the SSO Act in respect of head teachers and governing bodies in the event they conclude the grounds (section 17 of the SSO Act) for intervention have been made out, there are a number of courses of action available. These are set out in Part 2 of the SSO Act. For example, the Welsh Ministers can potentially issue a direction to revise the RSE Code so that it is compliant with the requirements of the 2021 Act.

However, the expectation is that the local authority will take action in the first instance. They have similar powers of direction and it is only if they fail to take action, or fail to take effective action, that the Welsh Ministers would intervene.

The Welsh Ministers also have powers to intervene in local authorities if they are acting or propose to act unlawfully so that 1 or more of the powers of intervention are made out (section 21 of the SSO Act).

### **If a parent wishes to withdraw their child from an RSE lesson, what should I do?**

The 2021 Act requires that RSE must be **developmentally appropriate** for individual learners. This means that schools and settings must design a curriculum for its setting but must then go on to consider the needs of the individual learners. This also extends to resources and provision by external providers. The RSE Code has been set out in three broad developmental phases to reflect this legal requirement.

The RSE statutory guidance is clear that schools and settings should have clear lines of communication in relation to RSE and should engage with learners, parents, carers and the wider community, offering them the opportunity to engage with learning and teaching in RSE.

The RSE Code and statutory guidance have been developed to accommodate a wide range of views, values and beliefs. Ensuring understanding about these different views is explicitly stated in both. Welsh Government has worked very closely with a range of community and faith organisations in developing this and it is hoped the Code and statutory guidance, properly understood, would not give parents and carers cause to withdraw their children.

Where significant concerns are raised, it will help to understand where these concerns have arisen from.

These may well be down to misunderstandings about what the Code and statutory guidance requires. Schools should share a link to the Code and statutory guidance as well as the leaflet and assets provided in the Hwb link below so that parents/carers can see exactly what is proposed for RSE in Wales.

Parents/carers may well have seen examples of highly inappropriate resources and be worried that these may be used in your school. You may want to help reassure parents/carers by showing them what resources you are using and to explain that inappropriate resources have no place.

Parents/carers may worry about the impact RSE will have on their children. Schools and settings can help parents and carers understand why RSE is so important and the role it can play in keeping their children well and safe. They may feel that their children aren't developmentally ready for specific learning. You may want to explain the schools' duty to ensure learning is developmentally appropriate and further explore whether their child is ready for specific learning.

## **Useful resources & information**

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[Relationships and sexuality education playlist - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

[A new curriculum in Wales: a guide for parents - Hwb \(gov.wales\)](#)

[Cross-cutting themes for designing your curriculum - Hwb \(gov.wales\) \(Link to the RSE Code and the statutory guidance\)](#)

To find out more contact: [CurriculumforWales@gov.wales](mailto:CurriculumforWales@gov.wales)