



Department
for Education

Relationships Education, RSE and Health Education: School Practice in Early Adopter Schools

Research report

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Ipsos MORI and the PSHE Association



Social Science in Government

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1. Introduction

This report presents the findings from a qualitative research study carried out by Ipsos MORI and the PSHE Association, on behalf of the Department for Education (DfE). This study aimed to understand how schools across a range of contexts approached the development and delivery of their current PSHE curriculum, as well as any specific considerations that may have been given to teaching the topics outlined in the new RSHE statutory requirements (see section 1.1 below). To explore this topic in detail, 30 telephone interviews were carried out with PSHE leads working in schools across England (12 primary schools and 18 secondary schools). This research was carried out between October and December 2019 and reflects some examples of school practice at a point in time before the introduction of compulsory RSHE (from September 2020). Overall, it is hoped that schools may find this report useful when developing their own practice; this report is intended to be read alongside the DfE's [statutory guidance](#) on RSHE.

Chapter 1 outlines the context to this research, highlighting that the new RSHE requirements are designed to strengthen and add to the PSHE education already taught in schools. This chapter also details the methodological approach of this study and provides guidance on interpreting the findings.

Chapter 2 summarises the interviewed schools' different approaches to PSHE education. In the context of this study, PSHE leads were defined as the person in each school who had clear overview of the development and delivery of their school's PSHE education. The participating PSHE leads ranged from those who adopted more proactive approaches (e.g. actively seeking resources and input from others) to those that adopted more reactive approaches (e.g. having an open door policy, which allowed parents, pupils, teachers and external organisations to contact them to discuss PSHE education). This chapter discusses how schools approached developing their curriculum and RSHE policies, as well as their delivery models for teaching PSHE education.

Chapter 3 provides examples of school practice in relation to PSHE education. These examples focus on how schools approached teaching RSHE topics, rather than the content of these lessons. Specifically, this chapter discusses school practices around working with local schools and organisations; managing difficult discussions in the classroom; and safeguarding and responding to disclosures. In addition, this chapter addresses specific considerations relating to teaching about mental health and wellbeing, and promoting inclusivity of LGBT within the classroom and wider school environment.

Chapter 4 presents the challenges schools faced when developing and delivering their PSHE education. These challenges can be described as knowledge barriers, resource barriers and systemic barriers. This chapter provides examples of these challenges and the factors that helped schools overcome them.

1.1. Policy background

By the start of the summer term 2021, all schools in England are required to teach the new subjects of Relationships Education (for all primary pupils), Relationships and Sex Education (for all secondary pupils), and Health Education (for primary and secondary pupils in state-funded schools)¹ (RSHE). The introduction of the new subjects follows years of pressure from many stakeholders to mandate the teaching of core content relating to relationships, sex and health in schools in England.

The subject of sex education became compulsory for maintained secondary schools in 1993. Some aspects of sex education could also form part of the national curriculum for science for 5-16 year olds. Despite it not being mandatory, primary schools were encouraged to teach sex education and many primary schools, academies, free schools and independent schools chose to do so as part of provision for a broad and balanced curriculum. When teaching sex education, including where primaries, academies and free schools chose to do so, schools were required to follow the statutory guidance for Sex and Relationships Education (2000)².

In a Policy Statement³ issued in March 2017, the Secretary of State for Education confirmed the Government's ambition to support all young people to stay safe and prepare for life in modern Britain by introducing new statutory subjects in all types of schools. The DfE undertook a consultation on the draft guidance and draft regulations for the new subjects in July-November 2018⁴. The consultation built upon a call for evidence⁵ (carried out between December 2017 and February 2018), which informed the development of the policy.

The content of the statutory RSHE guidance has resulted from the fact that today's children and young people are growing up in an increasingly complex world that looks very different from the way it did 20 years ago. The new environment presents many opportunities, but also challenges and risks. Children and young people need to know how to be safe and healthy, and how to manage their academic, personal, and social lives in a positive way, including online. The new RSHE requirements focus on updated content, so that teaching is relevant for young people today.

To understand how best to provide support to help schools prepare for teaching the content of the new subjects, the DfE consulted with a wide range of stakeholders, including schools and expert organisations. User research showed that many teachers

¹ [Relationships and sex education \(RSE\) and health education](#)

² [Statutory guidance on sex and relationship education](#)

³ [Statement on RSHE, 2017](#)

⁴ [Consultation on RSHE](#)

⁵ [Call for evidence](#)

who teach Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE)⁶ education and who will be teaching the new RSHE subjects are non-specialist in the subjects and many said they lack confidence and knowledge in teaching some of the new content.

High quality teaching of these subjects, which can improve pupils' educational outcomes, relies on high levels of teacher knowledge and confidence⁷, both in terms of planning and developing the curriculum and around teaching particularly sensitive topics. The DfE consultation and user research showed that, alongside other sources of support, PSHE/RSHE subject leads and teachers want concrete examples of practices from other schools, especially around topics such as engaging parents and managing difficult discussions in the classroom.

To support schools, the DfE published an online service on GOV.UK⁸ in September 2020, featuring training materials covering all of the teaching requirements in the statutory guidance. The DfE training materials were developed in collaboration with stakeholders, including Early Adopter schools, a reference group of over 1,500 schools who started teaching the new subjects from September 2019. The Early Adopter programme gave both the DfE and schools the opportunity to learn lessons about:

- Best practice on how these subjects are taught most effectively;
- How schools were preparing to teach the new requirements; and
- How the DfE can best support schools.

1.2. Aim of research project

The DfE commissioned Ipsos MORI, in partnership with the PSHE Association, to carry out qualitative research to understand how Early Adopter schools approached a range of aspects of PSHE education, including topics covered in the new RSHE statutory requirements, in order to provide examples of practice to help schools develop their own approaches.

1.2.1. Research objectives

To explore examples of school practice, 30 in-depth telephone interviews were carried out across a range of school types and contexts.

⁶ PSHE teaching already takes place in school. The new RSHE requirements are designed to strengthen this current provision as well as add new subject areas.

⁷ For example: [Literature Review Evaluating the Impact of PSHE on Students' Health, Wellbeing and Academic Attainment - Pro Economics & PSHE Association.](#)

⁸ [Teaching about relationships, sex and health - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#)

The overarching objectives of these interviews were to explore:

- How schools approached developing their current PSHE curriculum, developing practice to cover new statutory content and embedding this into wider school policies;
- The perceived benefits of different practices and approaches, as experienced by schools;
- The barriers and challenges associated with PSHE development and delivery, and how these have been tackled by schools;
- The wider context of the schools and how this has influenced the success of their chosen approaches;
- Examples of training and other continuing professional development (CPD) opportunities in relation to PSHE;
- Examples of working with external agencies in the delivery of PSHE;
- Examples of working with parents when planning and delivering the PSHE curriculum;
- How schools approached teaching sensitive topics; and
- Specific considerations in relation to teaching the topics outlined in the new RSHE statutory requirements.

It was recognised that, depending on a school's existing curriculum, some of the topics outlined in the new RSHE statutory requirements may have been taught (in some form) for several years, while others may have been introduced more recently. This research aimed to understand what changes schools had already made in response to the new requirements, as well as further changes they anticipated as these requirements are introduced into the curriculum.

By identifying key themes and examples of PSHE practices and challenges, including for RSHE subjects, this research project also aimed to help inform DfE's future support for schools.

It should be noted that an original aim of this research project was to produce pen portraits of concrete practice examples from the Early Adopter schools. The intention was to show how these schools have approached RSHE content and overcome challenges in doing so. Qualitative interviews with 30 schools revealed good practice and good intentions, but also an indication that some of these schools were then at the initial stages of RSHE delivery (RSHE content having been non-statutory up to this point). The format of reporting was therefore updated to reflect RSHE practice in Early Adopter schools at that point in time (October – December 2019) and examples included in this report are illustrative of a work in progress. With additional time, it is anticipated that

practice in relation to the new statutory requirements will have become more concrete and embedded.

1.3. Method

1.3.1. Sampling

The sampling was carried out using the DfE's Early Adopter database of schools. The database contained over 1,500 schools who voluntarily signed up (in summer 2019) as Early Adopters of the new statutory RSHE requirements and included information on school phase, region, religious character, school type, and school contact details. Schools without a contact phone number were excluded from the sample and details about school size, selectiveness and single-sex/mixed status were added from the DfE's publicly available 'Get Information About Schools' database. Quotas were defined to ensure a diverse range of schools based on these characteristics, and a sample of 300 schools was drawn for this research.

For full details regarding the quotas and achieved samples, please see [Appendix 1](#).

1.3.2. Recruitment

A specialist recruiter contacted schools in the sample to invite them to take part in the research project. The recruiter used a screener that was developed to serve the following purposes:

- **To identify the PSHE lead in each school**, who would have a clear view of development and delivery of the curriculum and teaching practice.
- **To ensure that schools were following the PSHE curriculum guidance** – schools were asked to confirm that they had a planned programme of regular PSHE teaching, that PSHE content was taught in its own lessons, that the PSHE curriculum was adapted to pupil/community needs, and that they monitored the content and delivery and assessed PSHE education in some way.
- **To identify the topic(s) that would be the focus of the research interview** – eligible schools were presented with a list of topics (see [Appendix 2](#)) and asked which of these topics they felt they could share clear examples of how their school effectively addresses the topic.

1.3.3. Data collection and analysis

As summarised below, a discussion guide was used to structure the interviews. This guide was designed to capture each school's local context, as well as their overall

approach to developing and delivering the PSHE curriculum, including the teaching of RSHE topics. As the research aimed to cover a wide range of aspects of PSHE education, the guide was then tailored for each school to cover one or two optional topics that the schools had identified as part of the recruitment screener.

In-depth interview discussion guide
Introduction (5 mins)
Context (5 mins) Understanding any of the local/contextual factors, the participant's role in the school and in relation to PSHE education
Overall approach to PSHE education (10 mins) Understanding how the PSHE curriculum was developed and how this has/will change in relation to the new statutory requirements, how this has been embedded into the whole-school approach, the PSHE delivery model
Specific examples of school practice (around 20 mins total) Optional topics for further exploration included: school-led examples of CPD, working with external agencies, engaging with parents, overall approach to teaching sensitive topics (including managing difficult classroom discussions, safeguarding and disclosure) and encouraging inclusivity (e.g. LGBT), teaching mental wellbeing, teaching about online safety, teaching about drugs, teaching about health, teaching about relationships (including sexual intimacy)
Closing the interview (5 mins)

Fieldwork was conducted by Ipsos MORI qualitative researchers between October and December 2019. Each telephone interview lasted up to 45 minutes and was carried out with the person in each school who had a clear overview of the development and delivery of their school's PSHE education (as identified by the screener); these participants are referred to as 'PSHE leads' throughout this report. In a small number of cases where the PSHE lead felt that someone else in the school (such as the Headteacher) would be able to offer additional information, interviews were carried out with two participants.

Throughout the fieldwork period, structured and detailed notes were produced (supplemented by digital recordings of the interviews). Regular team analysis sessions were also held to discuss the emerging findings and themes in more detail. Analysis was an iterative process, and this final report presents a summary of the key findings from the systematic approach to analysis.

1.3.4. Research ethics

To ensure that participants gave fully informed consent to take part in the research, several steps were taken to ensure that participants understood the research process:

- Schools were given information sheets that outlined the study in simple terms. This included what the research was about, why they were being asked to take part, and what taking part would involve. The information sheets also emphasised their rights as participants (for example, that their participation was voluntary), and detailed what personal data would be held and how it would be processed. Contact details for the compliance team at Ipsos MORI and the study contact at the DfE were also provided.
- The recruiter was fully briefed by the research team to answer any queries about the research.
- At the start of each interview, key information about the research was reiterated by the researcher. This included checking that the participant was still happy to take part, and collecting permission to audio record the interview.
- At the end of each interview, participants were asked if they had any queries and were signposted to the information sheet for more information and contact details.

1.4. A guide to interpreting the findings

This report provides examples of different school practices in relation to PSHE education and the teaching of RSHE topics. These examples have been included for illustrative purposes and are not intended as best practice guidance (a list of DfE resources have been provided in [Appendix 3](#)).

This report is intended to reflect the experiences and practices of the participating schools at the time of their interview. Schools who took part in this research signed up to be Early Adopters of the new requirements in summer 2019, shortly after the new statutory guidance was published. Early Adopters were encouraged by the DfE to adopt the new requirements from September 2019, but the schools who took part in this research had not necessarily approached all aspects of the new guidance or overcome the challenges they encountered by the time they were interviewed. Where relevant, the DfE statutory guidance has been referenced as footnotes. Schools may find this report useful when developing their own practice; this report should be read alongside the DfE's [statutory guidance on RSHE](#).

1.4.1. How accurately does this research project reflect the views of schools?

This is a small-scale qualitative study which, by its nature, is not designed to be statistically representative. It is intended to be illustrative, providing insight into the development and delivery of RSHE within a broader PSHE education curriculum among a small selection of Early Adopter schools. The findings presented in this report reflect only the perspectives of those interviewed and cannot be generalised to a wider sample of schools. Furthermore, these findings reflect participants' experiences and perceptions; the information provided has not been verified through other means. Findings have been anonymised throughout to protect the identity of participants. Where quotes are included, these have been attributed by phase of education to ensure anonymity. Quotes from special schools have been attributed by phase and type of school.

2. Overall approach to PSHE education

2.1. Role of the PSHE lead

Across all 30 schools interviewed, PSHE leads⁹ emphasised the importance of PSHE education for pupils' development and wellbeing. PSHE leads showed enthusiasm towards teaching PSHE and incorporating the new requirements, as the topics were seen as relevant and essential for children's development and everyday life. PSHE leads' views on the importance of PSHE education were reflected in the time and effort they spent developing the curriculum and content for their school, often through extensive research and work in their own time. In schools where PSHE education had relatively recently become a more important focus, some PSHE leads had created new schemes of work themselves, either from scratch or by updating an existing curriculum. In schools where the curriculum was more established, PSHE leads highlighted the time-consuming task of constantly updating the curriculum in line with relevant issues facing young people.

PSHE leads typically had multiple responsibilities in addition to leading PSHE education. Other responsibilities included being a member of the senior leadership team (SLT) and being responsible for areas such as wellbeing, careers, transitions (from other schools), or vocational education. Some were part of the pastoral team, or were heads of year groups. Others were class or subject teachers. They were rarely specialist teachers in PSHE and had often received little training for their role as PSHE leads. Some described themselves as having "fallen" into the PSHE lead role, either through being involved in related roles (e.g. pastoral team) or had taken on the role coming from an unrelated subject (e.g. chemistry teacher). The training PSHE leads had attended was generally in discrete sessions on specific PSHE topics, or was on more general pastoral or wellbeing topics that were not specifically aimed at PSHE leads or teachers. There was a range of professional experience among PSHE leads, but the lack of universal training specifically for PSHE, including in initial teacher education, meant that even the most experienced teachers did not necessarily feel knowledgeable about every specific topic in the new statutory requirements (e.g. awareness of "slang" terminology for drugs, or different online platforms).

PSHE leads ranged from those who adopted more proactive approaches to PSHE education in their schools, to those who took a more reactive approach. This appeared to be based on the school's culture or historical approach, the time afforded to PSHE, or the

⁹ Interview participants were identified as the person in each school who had a clear overview of the development and delivery of their school's PSHE education. They are referred to throughout this report as 'PSHE leads'.

PSHE lead's own interest. The range was particularly apparent in schools' approaches to engaging and responding to parents¹⁰. Some schools placed an emphasis on giving parents as much information and notice as possible, adopting a proactive approach by providing plans and updates on PSHE teaching throughout the year. Additionally, some schools organised parents' forums or discussions around PSHE, and attempted pre-emptive measures to alleviate parental concerns around sensitive topics by showing them the resources that would be used and allowing opportunities for questions ahead of time. Schools that adopted a proactive approach discussed being met with hesitation by certain parents, but felt that inviting them into the school to go through the curriculum together familiarised parents with what their children would be learning and made the parents feel more comfortable.

In contrast, other leads discussed having little-to-no proactive interactions with parents about PSHE, adopting a far more reactive strategy and addressing concerns when they arose. Reactive approaches also included having an open door policy, allowing parents, pupils or teachers to approach them when needed. Schools with a more reactive strategy were often happy to keep the approach going so long as it worked for their school. In some cases, schools with a reactive approach were moving towards being more proactive by planning sessions with parents about RSHE in direct response to the new requirements¹¹.

PSHE leads took different approaches to developing the curriculum, with proactive leads regularly consulting teachers, the SLT and governors; actively searching for new resources and external organisations to work with; identifying gaps in the curriculum or teacher knowledge; and using local data and information to identify current issues and keep the PSHE curriculum up to date. More reactive PSHE leads discussed being approached by external organisations, or by teachers when questions or issues arose.

PSHE leads tended to see it as their responsibility to make teaching PSHE as clear and easy as possible for other teachers to pick up, so often made pre-prepared teaching plans and resources available for others to use. Where teachers felt unable to plan or teach these subjects (due to lack of time, confidence or feeling uncomfortable teaching particular topics), responsibility would often fall to the PSHE lead. In some schools, PSHE leads expressed that the job expectations of their role were different to that of other subject leads in their school, in that they were not responsible for analysing pupil outcomes and were not always given additional time for the role. The amount of time available for PSHE leads to develop their curriculum varied by school; this appeared to

¹⁰ The term 'parents' is used throughout this report and refers to parents and carers of pupils.

¹¹ The DfE statutory guidance states that 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. Parents should be given every opportunity to understand the purpose and content. (paragraphs 41 to 42).

be tied to the value placed on PSHE education, compared to the other subjects taught within the curriculum.

However, some felt that the new requirements had prompted greater support and investment in developing and delivering PSHE education. This included increased interest from the SLT, which in some schools had led to the PSHE lead role being created, or had led to more time being allowed for teaching, planning and monitoring PSHE.

2.2. Developing policies

According to the DfE guidance, all primary schools need to have a policy in place for relationships education (and for sex education if they choose to teach it), and all secondary schools need to have one for relationships and sex education¹². The approach that schools took to develop these policies varied, with some schools choosing to produce a new standalone policy and others preferring to review and update their current PSHE education policy. Regardless of their approach, schools ensured their policies provided clear definitions (including an outline of what will be taught), and described the school's approach to teaching this content. It was important that this information was conveyed in a clear and accessible manner, providing transparency to parents, governors and the wider community¹³.

“We decided it was clearer to combine the PSHE and RSE policy as they are taught together. The policy covers all the information about what is being taught, where, how it is being assessed, and the links to keeping people safe.” – Secondary school

Although all interviewed schools consulted parents when developing and reviewing the content of their RSE and/or Relationships Education policies, the form this took varied depending on the school. Examples across the interviews included information letters, launching a consultation via email, holding focus groups, and inviting parents to school meetings. Schools emphasised that it was important to provide all parents the opportunity to ask questions and be heard. One primary school recognised that some parents felt less comfortable asking questions in a group setting, so organised separate one-to-one meetings to hear these parents' views. Overall, the interviewed schools found engaging

¹² The subjects of Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education became compulsory from 1 September 2020, as set out in the statutory guidance, with the new parental right to withdraw from sex education also coming into force (paragraphs 45 to 50).

¹³ The DfE statutory guidance states that all schools must have in place a written policy for Relationships Education and/or RSE as applicable. 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. Schools should make the policy available to parents and others (paragraphs 13 to 15).

with parents a positive experience; interactions with parents focused on clarification rather than addressing concerns.

“Parents and pupils were involved through a parents’ focus group and school council meetings. We tried really hard to get a range of parents from different backgrounds, including having one-to-one meetings where necessary. We feel that everyone has to be on board and work together.” – Primary school

In addition to ensuring the policy content met the needs of parents, schools felt it was important that parents adopted the same language and approach as the school when discussing these topics with their children – one school referred to this as giving children “consistent messages”.

“We also take seriously any issue that parents raise with teachers or governors about our policy or the arrangements for relationships and sex education in the school. We believe that, through the exchange of knowledge and information, children will benefit from being given consistent messages about their changing body and their increasing responsibilities.” – Primary special school

RSE/Relationships Education policies were also reviewed alongside the schools’ other policies (such as inclusion and bullying). The aim of this was to ensure consistency in language and approach across the school policies, as well as alignment with the school values and culture. One secondary school discussed developing a Code of Conduct for pupils, which outlined expectations around classroom conduct.

“Our RSHE policy fits in with the culture of our school values: courage, resilience and kindness.” – Secondary school

“PSHE [which includes relationships and health education] must reflect the school ethos and values¹⁴. We also think it is very important to fit the relationships education policy in with pastoral policies - for example, on inclusion and bullying - as we don’t want conflicting statements. They all dovetail together.” – Primary school

For transparency and as a point of reference (e.g. for parents), these are freely available on the schools’ websites. Schools recognised that by publishing these policies online, it helps maintain open communication with parents, governors and the wider community.

“We’ve just taken the stance that we want to be as open and transparent as possible. We welcome dialogue... everything is very clear on our school website. The

¹⁴ The guidance states that all schools must have in place a written policy for Relationships Education and/or RSE as applicable. 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. Schools should make the policy available to parents and others (paragraphs 13 to 15).

programme of study is there for everyone to see and ask questions about. That's the way we wanted to deliver this.” – Secondary school

These policies are regularly reviewed to ensure the content remains up-to-date. For example, it was common for schools to review their policy annually, which is then ratified by governors.

2.3. Adopting a whole-school approach

The DfE statutory guidance highlights that RSHE should be set within a context of “a wider whole-school approach to supporting pupils to be safe, happy and prepared for life beyond school” and the school’s “broader ethos and approach to developing pupils socially, morally, spiritually and culturally; and its pastoral care system”. As mentioned above, the schools who took part in this research discussed embedding RSHE within the wider aims of their school, which meant ensuring the messages they shared through their lessons on RSHE topics reflected their school’s chosen values (e.g. “courage, resilience and kindness”).

When planning and teaching RSHE, schools discussed working closely with their pastoral teams. Schools highlighted that their pastoral members of staff were able to identify key issues that were impacting their current year groups, which helped those teaching PSHE to develop new understanding of pupil needs. A secondary school gave the example of a year group that was experiencing difficulties within friendship groups, and so, the school responded by increasing the time spent teaching about handling friendship issues as part of their PSHE education lessons. In this way, schools expressed that the PSHE education curriculum was “tailored to needs of pupils as opposed to a generic programme”. It is important to note that this required flexibility within the timetable, which was not always feasible for the interviewed schools, and also that PSHE education/RSHE requires a planned and sequenced curriculum, which is tailored to local and pupil needs. In this way, emphasis shifts within the programme in response to needs (as in this example), rather than the programme becoming a reactive response to events.

In addition to participating in the curriculum development, schools highlighted that the pastoral team’s awareness of pupil needs also contributed to pupil safeguarding and identifying where there may be risk of pupils becoming distressed. To facilitate this, it was important for the PSHE lead or those teaching RSHE content to keep the pastoral team informed about what was to be taught and when. For example, in a secondary school that was teaching cancer awareness as part of their health education, the pastoral teams were asked to consider whether there might be any pupils personally affected by this. The pastoral team were aware that a pupil’s mum had died of cancer, and so, this particular pupil was given a week’s notice that this topic would be taught in their PSHE

lesson, as well as the opportunity to decide whether they felt comfortable attending this particular session.

“It’s important to work with the school system and pastoral team. As, if something is going on in the young person’s life and then when you’re talking about it in the lesson, the [young] person will need more support so it’s good to let the safeguarding and pastoral team know what’s going on, to warn them of what is coming up so they know if they need to keep an eye on the child.” – Secondary school

In line with this, schools recognised that the pastoral team may not always be aware of issues that are disclosed when discussing RSHE topics. Schools emphasised that it was therefore crucial for those teaching RSHE to work closely with the school’s pastoral team, who could then provide the appropriate support and escalation to other services.

“We investigated two serious cases of FGM following lessons on that topic. MASH [Multi Agency Safeguarding Hub] and police were involved.” – Secondary school

As part of the wider whole-school approach, schools argued that teaching RSHE supported the development of important attributes in pupils, which could be applied more broadly to school and the wider community. For example, one primary school identified that participating in the PSHE education curriculum encouraged their pupils to develop qualities such as respecting others and how to follow social ‘rules’. This was further emphasised by a special school, which recognised that the PSHE education curriculum offered them the opportunity to support their pupils to learn independence (e.g. making their own choices) and social skills (e.g. turn-taking). This particular school embedded these lessons into their school day, using a reference grid to highlight the points in the day where independence and social skills could be developed, both in formal lessons and other contexts (e.g. as part of the morning or end of day routines, or meal times).

In addition to supporting the development of important attributes, schools discussed providing pupils the opportunities to apply what they have learnt in PSHE education lessons to life in school. A key example of this was the teaching of behavioural expectations; pupils were taught strategies (such as how to be a good friend or what is appropriate behaviour) that aligned with the schools’ behaviour policies, and were then encouraged to put these behavioural strategies into practice throughout the school day.

“All pulled together with the behaviour policy, how we conduct ourselves at school. With weekly sessions, it’s nice to have the opportunity to have that time together to think about strategies that they could use in the playground, things that they could use in that week. We use it as quite a reflective time. So we’ve talked about a strategy, for example, qualities of being a good friend, and then they’ve got that time in the week to think about how it’s put into practice.” – Primary school

“I’ve just been on duty at lunch today, a small group of year 7 boys with a cricket bat and a ball were not using it in the right way, so we had a big discussion about it, how it would make the environment nicer if they didn’t do that – a completely different angle on it. And I know they’ve been talking about it in PSHE, so all I’m doing is building on things I know they’ve already discussed. You can tell they’ve discussed it previously because they weren’t surprised, then they come to their own conclusions that what they were doing isn’t the right thing to do. It’s something these boys do every day.” – Secondary school

Furthermore, to support a whole-school approach, schools also expressed that teaching in RSHE lessons is reinforced through school-wide focuses and themes, including national events (such as anti-bullying week and LGBT history month).

“The Head here created a framework to work within. So throughout the whole school we have a theme of the week – different every week and is talked about in form time and [taught in] integrated studies, as well as assemblies. It goes across the whole school.” – Secondary school

2.4. Delivery models

Schools adopted a range of delivery models for PSHE, mainly dependent on the time, resources and importance afforded to the subject by the SLT. Schools reported one or a combination of the following delivery models for PSHE education:

- **Weekly or fortnightly timetabled lessons for dedicated PSHE teaching:** Schools with this approach were likely to report that their SLT afforded high priority to PSHE. In schools where the interviewed PSHE leads perceived PSHE as less valued than other subjects, the timetabled slots would sometimes be replaced with other subjects when needed. These regular sessions could also be timetabled as a rolling programme, where PSHE took the slot of a different subject each week.
- **PSHE topics covered in form periods, weekly or in blocks of weeks throughout the year:** Form periods could last up to an hour, and were taught by form tutors across the school. PSHE leads highlighted the benefit that form tutors knew their pupils well and could become the first port of call for questions and issues. However, it was also recognised that form tutors had rarely received training on PSHE topics and did not necessarily have the experience needed, so could be less comfortable or confident teaching some topics.
- **Off-timetable days or workshops for PSHE:** Some schools had a number of dedicated days or one-off sessions throughout the school year to focus on specific PSHE topics. Commonly these days would focus on more sensitive parts of the curriculum (e.g. sexual health) and were combined with regular curriculum time for PSHE education. The PSHE lead would generally teach these off-timetable days

or workshops, and external organisations would also sometimes be involved. It should be noted that many schools considered regular curriculum time as being more appropriate given off-timetable days alone mean pupils who are absent on those particular days risk missing out on a full day of PSHE education sessions, which is more challenging for pupils to catch up on than being absent for one lesson. In addition, using off-timetable days alone doesn't allow for the sequenced learning required by the statutory guidance in the same way as planned, regular lessons.

- **Reflection time/worship time:** Primary, faith schools and special schools for children with special educational needs or disabilities (SEND) mentioned using weekly “calm time” or worship time to cover pupil wellbeing as well as some PSHE topics. This was similar to the form period approach, where all class teachers would take on PSHE teaching in these slots.

Across the different models of delivery, schools typically had planned programmes of teaching for each year group. Some schools opted for a pre-designed, sometimes paid-for, curriculum, whilst other programmes were developed by the school's PSHE lead and supported by resources from various sources. The pre-designed schemes were seen by some participants as a way of ensuring all aspects of the PSHE education curriculum, including the new RSHE requirements, were covered, though they had a downside of being more difficult to tailor to schools and pupils' particular needs.

Programmes with more planning input by the PSHE lead were more time-intensive to develop and keep up-to-date, with individual research needed into when and how best to cover all the required topics, though this had the advantage of providing more bespoke support and a diversity of external expertise.

It was highlighted for both pre-designed programmes and those developed by the PSHE lead that effective teaching was reliant on PSHE leads and/or PSHE teachers having the time to tailor the lessons to the needs of their pupils and the school context.

There was also some awareness of there being no one size fits all approach for PSHE education. In most cases schools felt that materials needed to be adapted for their school, year groups or individual class groups. PSHE leads often took responsibility for adapting resources for their school, and they encouraged those teaching PSHE to adapt resources for their class. However, it was recognised that time constraints meant teachers were not always able to do this. The need to adapt resources was particularly emphasised in special schools, where pupil needs and abilities were more varied and existing resources were often inaccessible to these pupils.

Schools with more history of teaching comprehensive PSHE education, as well as having more experience and confidence in their PSHE teaching, discussed creating a planned

PSHE education programme that spanned across the whole school, rather than just individual year groups. This involved addressing the same broad topic areas every year with their students, but extending the learning and going into more depth according to what they deemed appropriate for each age group. This could also be taken one step further and planned across schools in a Trust or local area, to ensure, for example, that all pupils transitioning from primary to secondary school had the same base of knowledge and had covered the same topics. This knowledge could then be built upon in the next school phase.

In addition to a timetabled PSHE education programme, schools that placed higher importance on PSHE tended to embed aspects of PSHE teaching across the wider school curriculum and culture. Schools that adopted this whole school approach also mentioned the importance of revisiting and reinforcing elements of PSHE education across all subjects (e.g. using more inclusive language; promoting respect throughout the school; promoting health and wellbeing; and reducing stigma around mental health). This was relevant to all subjects, as well as assemblies and behaviour throughout the school. In primary schools, examples included ensuring story times involved characters from different backgrounds or with different family dynamics. Across the curriculum, schools gave examples of referencing different kinds of relationships or diversity of people to promote awareness and inclusivity. These schools typically had strong support from the Headteacher and SLT, or had a long-standing history of comprehensive PSHE education as standard across the school.

2.4.1. Tailoring the curriculum

As mentioned, schools highlighted the benefit of tailoring their PSHE curriculum to the needs of the pupils in their school¹⁵.

“It’s a needs-based curriculum, so I have to make sure we’re including the things that are pertinent to our pupils...We do a lot of mental health because this is common – eating disorders, self-harm – you’ve got to be aware of what’s going on in your school and develop the curriculum.” – Secondary school

¹⁵ The DfE statutory guidance states that schools must have regard to the guidance (see summary on page 6 of the [guidance document](#)). However, schools are free to determine how to deliver the content in the guidance in the context of a broad and balanced curriculum, and that teaching will include sufficient well-chosen opportunities and contexts for pupils to embed new knowledge so that it can be used confidently in real life situations (paragraph 5). Schools must also ensure that their teaching and materials are appropriate, having regard to the age and religious backgrounds of their pupils. Schools will also want to recognise the significance of other factors, such as any special educational needs or disabilities of their pupils (paragraph 68).

This tailoring of the curriculum was often linked to the context and local community of the school; for example, resources could be made more relevant to pupils by making sure they were representative (e.g. in terms of ethnic diversity) of those in the school or community (e.g. different types of communities, cultures or religions). Putting examples in relevant contexts or using real-life examples also enhanced pupils' understanding of concepts. For example, a PSHE lead described an example tailoring their teaching about consent and the law to the global #MeToo movement, which was particularly prevalent in the media at the time of teaching.

Schools highlighted that understanding the local community context and current issues enhanced their curriculum by ensuring that issues pertinent to pupils were addressed. For example, one secondary school described working with their local police community support officer to understand an increasing issue of county lines drug trafficking, particularly of cocaine, in the area, which then led to a focus on teaching about the dangers of cocaine when covering drugs under the PSHE curriculum. Alternatively, reflecting a different local context, a primary school noted that their PSHE education curriculum looked specifically at the drug cannabis "because that's what's in the local area, what children are most likely to come into contact with when they get older". PSHE leads felt that addressing local issues helped prepare children for what they would face outside of school or in the future.

To help understand local issues, schools and other local organisations sometimes carried out surveys of their pupils, which included questions on PSHE related topics. Schools used this data, where available, to identify gaps in pupil knowledge, to better understand pupils' behaviour as a basis for teaching about safety (e.g. understanding the online platforms young people use to ensure appropriate teaching about online safety), and to inform their curriculum planning by identifying the RSHE topics that were pertinent to their pupils.

"We use the answers to the survey to inform lessons - for example, if year 8s are saying they have tried smoking, we move the lessons on the dangers and risks of smoking into year 7 to prepare them." – Secondary school

In addition, schools discussed using other sources of data about the local community to help tailor the PSHE education curriculum. A common example of this was using local authority level data provided by Public Health England (PHE), which indicates the public health profile of the local area and allows schools to adapt their teaching to reflect common health issues.

"And also used PHE local data and ChiMat data to get more of an understanding of the community. To get an understanding of the health of the area allows you to be a bit preventative instead of providing intervention. Prevention rather than

intervention is the aim. Help students manage struggles and difficulties ahead of them.” – Secondary school

Schools also used individual level data to tailor the PSHE education curriculum. As discussed, one way of doing this was working closely with the school’s pastoral teams to understand pupil needs and experiences. The PSHE lead at a primary school discussed an example of placing recent school issues into the context of PSHE education. In this example, children and parents in the school had reported that some pupils were sending “not nice” messages to each other over text. When planning their lessons covering online safety and harms, the school therefore decided to teach their pupils the implications of this type of behaviour (e.g. “sending a message saying ‘I hate you’ is a lot more hurtful when you send it online, it’s taken out of context and you can’t see their facial expressions or their body language to see if they mean it in a joking way or more seriously.”) In other examples, schools had decided to bring forward topics that were currently more pertinent to some of their pupils (e.g. teaching about alcohol abuse earlier in the school year, following an incident where a pupil needed their stomach pumped over the summer holidays). Schools highlighted, however, that it was not always feasible – or advisable – to amend the sequencing of topics in order to put current issues into the context of PSHE education, with the logistics of the timetable and availability of relevant external organisations cited as key challenges.

To meet individual pupil needs, schools also had differentiated schemes of learning for pupils of varying abilities and ages. Schools discussed tailoring the content of these lessons to include topics that were appropriate, relatable and comprehensible. For example, when teaching mental health, younger pupils or those in lower ability groups may talk about feelings and different types of emotions. On the other hand, older pupils or those in higher ability groups may extend this by learning about mental health conditions such as anxiety and depression. It is anticipated that as pupils progress, the same subjects will be revisited so that pupils can gain a deeper knowledge of the topic. Similarly, tailoring to the age of pupils, a primary school noted that they would not teach about the different types of social platforms to pupils in the younger year groups (due to relevance and access age limits). Instead, they would teach about how to safely search and communicate online, and understanding who you are connecting with and what content is appropriate.

Tailoring the content of the curriculum was a particular consideration for special schools, where pupils had greater variability in their specific learning and accessibility needs. One primary special school reported that they made their own resources for teaching PSHE to ensure they were appropriate to the current abilities and targets for each child; the focus here was on accessibility of the curriculum to all pupils.

In relation to age, where pupils were on their educational journey was also relevant to the content of the PSHE curriculum. For example, the transition between primary and

secondary school was cited as a key period for schools to consider, with this transition and increased independence presenting new challenges (e.g. around safety¹⁶).

“All of our PSHE is preparing them for what they’re going to encounter when they come into secondary school. For example, if we know they’re going to start walking home by themselves, or get a mobile phone, preparing them to be safe in those situations and make the right choices if there’s a risk involved.” – Primary school

Language was an important consideration; for example, a secondary school highlighted that, when teaching about online safety, some pupils find the concept of a digital footprint difficult to understand, so they use the analogy of a tattoo to help explain the concept. This reference helps pupils understand that a digital footprint means what they do online will “stay with you” and you “can’t get rid of it”, just like a tattoo.

To help schools’ tailor the curriculum to the different RSHE subjects, one secondary school reported using the subject expertise of the teachers within the school. This school gave the example of using their science teachers to plan the curriculum content on organ donations, rather than using Information Technology (IT) teachers who would be better suited to the topic of online safety.

In addition to curriculum planning, PSHE leads noted that “different kids react differently to the topics”, including the types of questions they may ask when discussing RSHE topics. As such, they emphasised that teachers needed to be prepared to adapt their teaching in response to the feedback in the classroom.

2.4.2. School-led training in RSHE

In line with PSHE leads receiving little training, it was common for PSHE to be taught by non-specialist teachers, and formal or consistent CPD for those teaching PSHE did not seem to be in place in many schools. Staffing for PSHE was often dictated by who had time available in their timetable or who felt confident enough to teach the topics, meaning that those teaching PSHE were often different from one year to the next and did not necessarily have PSHE teaching experience. In schools that had dedicated PSHE teachers or more consistency in who taught the lessons, PSHE leads highlighted the

¹⁶ The DfE statutory guidance states that schools must have regard to the guidance (see summary on page 6 of the [guidance document](#)). However, schools are free to determine how to deliver the content in the guidance in the context of a broad and balanced curriculum, and that teaching will include sufficient well-chosen opportunities and contexts for pupils to embed new knowledge so that it can be used confidently in real life situations (paragraph 5). Schools must also ensure that their teaching and materials are appropriate, having regard to the age and religious backgrounds of their pupils. Schools will also want to recognise the significance of other factors, such as any special educational needs or disabilities of their pupils (paragraph 68).

benefit of being able to build up knowledge and experience of the most effective and sensitive ways of teaching topics, which also contributed to teachers feeling more confident in teaching PSHE. To further support building teachers' confidence and knowledge in relation to teaching PSHE education, some PSHE leads offered peer training or observations, and developed resources for other teaching staff to refer to. Examples of such resources included "a crib sheet of FAQs, highlighting staff concerns about teaching and helping them deliver to a higher standard" and a glossary of terms to provide a shared language to talk about things (e.g. a glossary for relationships and sex education, which "included things from medical terms and conditions to slang and phrases").

"I also offer opportunities to come and watch me teach my lessons, or I go and teach the class for the other teacher so they can watch. [Teachers] know they can have conversations about particular subject areas whenever necessary, and they can email me and ask questions." – Secondary school

2.4.3. Assessment, evaluation and monitoring

There was variation in the ways and extent to which schools went about monitoring and evaluating the delivery of their PSHE education curriculum. Across the interviews, schools seemed more likely to have procedures for monitoring delivery than processes for formal evaluation and assessment of PSHE education. Approaches included learning walks¹⁷, lesson observations, collecting feedback from pupils and/or teachers, and use of local survey data relating to PSHE education topics (to identify gaps in teaching). The PSHE lead was usually the person responsible for organising and carrying out monitoring and evaluation of the curriculum and delivery, but in some cases the SLT or subject teachers were involved in these processes. PSHE leads particularly highlighted the difficulty in ensuring the curriculum was consistently up-to-date and appropriate for pupils, due to the broad and fast-changing nature of the topics covered (e.g. online safety and harms). Where a regular review process was not in place, the new statutory requirements had in some cases prompted schools to review their curriculum to ensure all topics were covered and up-to-date, and set up more formal monitoring processes.

Whilst pupil feedback was collected and used for evaluation, there was far less assessment of pupils' progress¹⁸. Types of assessment mentioned typically included

¹⁷ Learning walks typically involve brief classroom visits to collect evidence about teaching and learning, evidence of progress and areas for development.

¹⁸ The DfE statutory guidance states that schools should have the same high expectations of the quality of pupils' work in these subjects as for other curriculum areas. Teaching should be assessed and assessments used to identify where pupils need extra support or intervention. Whilst there is no formal examined assessment for these subjects, there are some areas to consider in strengthening quality of provision (paragraphs 123 to 125).

baseline assessments, where pupils were asked about their current knowledge of a topic in advance of a lesson, and knowledge level was revisited at the end of a topic to assess progress. Pupils were often asked to quantify their knowledge at baseline, and then again at the end of the topic (e.g. using a five-point scale). These types of assessment were used in both primary and secondary schools.

“The children carry out an assessment task before we start a PSHE unit, which informs how we approach the topic. They then revisit their original ideas at the end of the unit and add anything they have learned or changed. It’s very much led by what they know and what they need to know.” – Primary school

“We have implemented an assessment tracker for PSHE...the tracker consists of ‘I can’ statements, and these are measured against previous iterations of the assessment tracker.” – Primary special school

PSHE leads stressed that they were often unsure how to assess pupils on PSHE education topics, or felt pressure from their SLT not to assess pupils on the subject. This pressure was due to the perception that it was inappropriate to formally assess pupils in a subject that focused on personal development, rather than academic attainment.

2.5. Senior leadership involvement

Buy-in and support from the SLT was seen as a key factor for enabling changes and affording priority to PSHE education. PSHE leads highlighted the impact of the SLT’s involvement on the following areas of the development and delivery of the PSHE curriculum:

- **Timetabling:** PSHE leads had little control over timetabling of PSHE lessons, which impacted the programme of learning they were able to implement. There was a consensus that regular teaching was better than one-off sessions, but the school timetable did not always allow for this approach. Similarly, PSHE leads discussed having to fit a broad programme into too short periods (e.g. form time) if PSHE was not given its own lessons as part of the timetable. In schools where the SLT was said to be more involved in developing the PSHE approach, PSHE leads often mentioned having tried multiple delivery models, usually starting with one-off sessions and moving towards a more regular model of lessons. Where PSHE was perceived to be lower down the SLT’s list of priorities¹⁹, PSHE teaching risked

¹⁹ This research took place between October and December 2019, before the new RSHE curriculum became compulsory from September 2020. Schools are free to determine how to deliver the content set out in the statutory guidance, in the context of a broad and balanced curriculum (paragraph 5).

dropping off the timetable altogether, with this time being used to catch up on teaching other subjects instead.

- **Time and resources for PSHE:** The SLT determined who would teach PSHE lessons and how much planning time and budget was allowed. Where PSHE was given equal weight to other subjects, PSHE leads were given more time for their role and were less likely to take on additional responsibilities (e.g. updating the PSHE curriculum) in their own time. Where teachers were given more time for PSHE, lessons were more likely to be adapted to pupil needs. In some of the interviewed schools – typically those with lower levels of SLT involvement in PSHE – teachers picked up lesson plans and resources shortly before lessons with little time for preparation²⁰. This meant these teachers were often less familiar and confident in teaching PSHE lessons.
- **Teacher training:** Although examples of teacher training were generally limited across the school interviews, some PSHE leads noted that, where the opportunity arose, their SLT allowed staff to go on training courses and to share their learning from this training with other teachers. The responsibility for finding and organising this training varied, however. Where PSHE leads were proactive and invested their personal time in their role, some would seek out training opportunities for themselves and other PSHE teachers. In other cases, responsibility for identifying training gaps would fall to the SLT, with some PSHE leads discussing being sent on training.
- **Embedding the approach across the school:** Schools with strong backing for PSHE education from the SLT emphasised the impact this could have on the whole school culture. Where PSHE was considered a priority, they linked their PSHE approach to the school's values and policies (e.g. around inclusion), and this filtered through to other subjects and behaviour (e.g. assemblies). These schools were also more likely to have a range of initiatives around pupil wellbeing and life skills, such as projects on inclusion and diversity, which would be displayed in school.
- **Monitoring and evaluating delivery:** Schools where the SLT was said to show an active interest in PSHE education tended to be more aware of the need to monitor and evaluate the PSHE curriculum and delivery, and made efforts to review and update the curriculum regularly. In some cases, the Headteacher

²⁰ The statutory guidance states that 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 (paragraph 13). 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 (paragraph 24).

would hold the PSHE lead to account for monitoring and evaluating PSHE education, with regular meetings to plan and collaboratively monitor progress and evaluate the content and delivery of the curriculum. Schools with perceived lower engagement from the SLT tended to have no or less established monitoring or evaluation of PSHE education.

- **Working with parents:** Schools with more support for PSHE from the SLT were more likely to try to engage parents in the PSHE curriculum proactively rather than dealing with issues reactively when they arose.

The announcement of the new RSHE statutory requirements had prompted recent improvements in some schools. The Government requirements were seen to help place importance on PSHE as a subject for the SLT, and in some cases led to increased time in the timetable to spend on PSHE or the appointment of a new dedicated PSHE lead role. It was highlighted that the new requirements had afforded further time for the PSHE lead, which could be used for tasks such as monitoring or assessment.

3. Examples of school practice

3.1. Working with local schools and organisations

Local partnerships or networks of schools and other organisations were seen as extremely useful for sourcing and developing ideas and resources, and in some cases for staff training. These networks were made up of schools in a Trust, or schools across a local authority, and sometimes included external organisations or experts on specific aspects of PSHE. Schools who discussed being part of these local networks described making extensive use of shared materials and approaches to teaching PSHE. Some networks would also produce formal guidance on what schools should be covering in their PSHE curriculum, which PSHE leads found useful as a tool for auditing their curriculum. Some PSHE leads mainly used these networks in the past for creating their programme of teaching, but others also accessed regular training on PSHE topics through these networks.

Schools in some areas also worked together to coordinate teaching across schools. For example, schools discussed mapping out what all primary schools in the area were covering and when, to ensure that all pupils across schools were on the same level of knowledge at various time points. This was particularly useful for secondary schools to know which parts of the curriculum had been covered by pupils transitioning into their school, to then pick up PSHE teaching without excessive overlap or pupils missing out on topics.

Schools also worked with local organisations for the delivery of PSHE education content, with organisations such as the police, local nurses, theatre groups, and charities coming into schools to deliver relevant parts of the curriculum. Examples included the police teaching about legal aspects of internet safety, hate crime or issues associated with drugs and the law (such as county lines and knife crime); local nurses teaching about healthy eating or contraception; theatre groups delivering drama workshops around the topic of relationships; and charities that specialise in supporting mental health and wellbeing. However, there were mixed views on the benefit of involving these organisations²¹. Some felt that bringing in external individuals who might be experts or authority figures in their field made the teaching experience for a topic more memorable and powerful. They also offered a different perspective and had the added benefit of exposing children to different career options. Others felt compelled to bring external

²¹ The DfE statutory guidance states that working with external organisations can enhance delivery of these subjects, bringing in specialist knowledge and different ways of engaging with young people. Use of visitors should be to enhance teaching by an appropriate member of the teaching staff, rather than as a replacement for teaching by those staff (paragraphs 51 to 53).

organisations in without a clear rationale, or felt this was more of a tick box exercise and could incur additional logistical challenges with no significant benefit. Challenges included ensuring the quality of delivery, with concerns around a lack of guidance on how to assess external content and ensure safeguarding of pupils, as well as how to fit external organisations into the school's PSHE education timetable (e.g. multiple visits needed for different class groups), and potential costs for some organisations.

When working with external organisations, schools expressed that it was their responsibility to ensure the content of these sessions aligned with their planned curriculum and was appropriate for their audience of pupils. Schools would therefore carry out checks in advance, including discussing what has already been covered in lessons, their expectations about what should be addressed, reviewing materials (such as presentation decks) and being walked-through what they plan to deliver. A key consideration was the safeguarding of pupils, with schools identifying whether any pupils may be affected by the content of the session and ensuring a teacher was always in the room throughout delivery. Prior to the session, schools highlighted that they would discuss their policy around handling disclosure with external organisations; in line with classroom practice, it was expressed that any disclosure of sensitive or personal issues to an external organisation would need to be shared with school staff (such as the PSHE lead, the Designated Safeguarding Lead, or pastoral team), who would then signpost or contact other support services where necessary.

“Police officers go in regularly to talk to the children about keeping safe. This takes away stigma that the police are only around when there are crimes and that actually, they are here to teach and help keep you safe... [The pupils] are never left alone, a teacher is always in with the pupils. If a child wants to go speak to a police officer - pupils know staff don't hold secrets – so if pupils said something to a police officer, then they would tell me, as Head of PSHE, so that I could take further actions and speak about it further with the pupil.” – Primary school

To further promote quality assurance, schools often relied on the expertise of others to signpost them to resources and external organisations that have already been “vetted”. Sources included school nurses, wellbeing co-ordinators, a public health in schools co-ordinator, a local authority PSHE advisor, and a safer schools officer.

Some schools reported receiving further support through their local universities and outreach programmes. However, the aims of these programmes did not necessarily align closely with the PSHE education curriculum, with the outreach provision provided generally aiming to support pupils' progression to higher education.

3.2. Managing difficult discussions in the classroom

Across the interviews, schools discussed the various steps they took to ensure pupils feel able to participate in discussions in PSHE education lessons and know how to do so safely and respectfully. This included establishing ground rules at the start of pupils' PSHE education, which serve as clear and consistent "markers for pupils' behaviour expectations". Common ground rules addressed the issues of confidentiality and the use of distancing techniques; respecting and listening to others' opinions; and not judging or challenging one another. In both primary and secondary schools, teachers facilitated the co-creation of these ground rules, which encouraged pupils to share ownership and abide by the agreed ways to behave in discussions. One school noted that these ground rules applied to "all areas of the curriculum, not just PSHE".

"In the first lesson of every year we talk about showing respect and compassion to each other. The pupils come up with rules, for example, one person at a time, no personal stories, not laughing at anyone, not shouting out... Ground rules are set and always referred back to." – Secondary school

The implementation of ground rules supported schools in establishing a classroom environment that encouraged open discussion and questions from pupils. However, it was also common for schools to provide pupils with the opportunity to ask questions anonymously, which facilitated questions from pupils who may not want to talk in lessons or who may feel uncomfortable asking their questions in a class setting. For example, a secondary school promoted this practice as it meant pupils "will be more comfortable asking questions they worry will be seen as stupid." Across the interviews, the most common way of providing this opportunity to pupils was providing an "ask it basket" or drop box. Alternative strategies included connecting with parents so they can continue the discussion at home, and a school texting service that allowed pupils to text the pastoral team any time they had a concern.

"We have an ask it basket where students can put in questions anonymously which are answered periodically. It is always there, so students can ask questions about something they feel uncomfortable about at any time." – Secondary school

"We make sure there are opportunities for them to ask questions. We put in drop boxes, which can be anonymous or not. A lot will put their names on if they are wanting to talk about something. It can be ideas, for example, things they've seen happen in the playground. That is seen as confidential. It won't be further discussed unless it needs to be." – Primary school

When discussing RSHE topics, some schools highlighted the importance they placed on using distancing techniques, which encourage pupils to discuss issues objectively rather than talking about their own lives and experiences. This process was described as

“separating” the pupil from the actual topics. To create this distance, pupils would instead take on a role or talk about the experiences of characters in a story or video (for example, discussing what a particular character should or could do in that situation).

*“Our RSHE programme... has a whole section on how to deliver safely and make sure discussions aren’t personal, for example using characters throughout the delivery that are gender neutral with names that no one in the class has.” –
Secondary school*

*“We use distancing techniques; so no personal stories, and we also try and think about the way a question is asked, not ‘what would you do?’ but instead ‘what could someone do in that situation?’ This helps pupils not personalise it.” –
Secondary school*

To help prepare pupils for potentially difficult discussions, it was highlighted that all schools give advance notice of what the PSHE curriculum will cover²². This allows the pastoral team or teachers to identify and speak to students that may be potentially impacted by upcoming topics. Similarly, it gives pupils the opportunity to come forward if they feel they may be affected by the teaching of a particular topic; schools can then “give them support to make the best decision for them”. Options discussed included sharing content of the lesson in advance, providing space for those who do not want to stay in the classroom, choosing to stay in the lesson but opting out of being called on or asked to contribute, accessing support (e.g. a member of staff or “buddy dog” joining them in the lesson, or meeting with a wellbeing officer for additional support outside the classroom), and providing pupils with an exit strategy to use if needed (e.g. going to a provided space outside the classroom). It was noted that pupils may not wish to draw attention to themselves if they are feeling impacted by a lesson, so teachers would need to look out for any signs of a negative reaction (e.g. a pupil covering their face or looking upset), and the teacher can then subtly ask them if they want to leave. In addition, one of the special schools interviewed observed that their pupils are more likely to have one-to-one support, which supported the delivery of potentially difficult topics.

“For pupils negatively impacted by discussions on mental wellbeing, the PSHE lead would approach the teacher and warn them that teaching might be troubling for them, and that the child might need time away from the room where [PSHE] is

²² The DfE statutory guidance sets out how schools should engage with parents/carers, to discuss what will be taught and when and to communicate parents’ right to withdraw from some or all of sex education delivered as part of statutory RSE (paragraph 41). It should be noted that schools should respect the parents’ request to withdraw the child, up to and until three terms before the child turns 16. After that point, if the child wishes to receive sex education rather than be withdrawn, the school should make arrangements to provide the child with sex education during one of those terms (paragraphs 45 to 50).

being taught. Commonly these children have 1:1 support anyway. If children don't want to join in, they don't have to. They have a buddy dog which comes in and they get to stroke the dog and it breaks up the session.” – Primary special school

During discussions, schools noted that it was important to provide pupils with the appropriate language “to express themselves in the right way”. For example, when teaching sex education, pupils would be given the correct terminology to use (e.g. in relation to the sex organs), taught to understand what is meant by terms such as consent, rape and sexting, and the use of slang terms would be challenged. This example was mentioned by a number of schools, which emphasised the importance of teaching “what language is and is not appropriate to use and why”, particularly for the topic of sex education. In addition to using the correct terminology, schools discussed ensuring pupils’ classroom comments were also appropriate. This was often grounded in the schools’ ground rules (which emphasised showing respect), as well as wider school policies (e.g. not condoning bullying and acts of discrimination as part of the whole-school behavioural policy).

“We approach all discussions from the angle of tolerance and respect. [Pupils know] that they can challenge the beliefs, not the person.” – Secondary school

“Clear consequences for bullying, for example, transphobic, homophobic or biphobic comments, are laid in [the school’s whole-school] behavioural policy.” – Secondary school

When teaching potentially difficult topics, schools consistently signposted pupils to where they can go for further support. This included both internal sources of support (e.g. teachers providing an open-door policy for pupils who may want to come in for a chat, or access to an on-site school counsellor), as well as external organisations if pupils felt unable to speak to someone at school or preferred to seek support outside of school. This information was often included as part of a lesson’s presentation deck (allowing teachers to tailor the types of support organisations listed to the specific topic being taught), as well as displayed within the classroom so that pupils could access this “at any time without feeling self-conscious”. To ensure accessibility of this information, one of the special schools interviewed noted that they would look at the websites and resources with the children to help them understand where to go for support; they also provided this information on an accessible help card.

“Lessons ended with where you can get some more support and help. We have a slide with specific things on depending on the lesson: where to get help externally, suggesting websites and helplines, to speak to doctors, and places in school to go and get support. We have this at the end of any lessons to do with [PSHE education].” - Secondary school

3.3. Safeguarding and responding to disclosures

Across the interviews, schools recognised their responsibility to teach pupils to keep themselves and others safe²³. All schools have a safeguarding and child protection policy (including a designated safeguarding lead), which ensures the school environment is safe and secure for all pupils. Schools also consistently noted that safeguarding has a “close link” to managing behaviour, both within the classroom (e.g. reflecting the agreed ground rules) and wider school environment (e.g. the school’s whole-school approach to behaviour).

In addition, schools used their PSHE education lessons to promote safeguarding - for example, by teaching pupils how to stay safe online (e.g. being aware of who they are connecting with and how to handle strangers potentially contacting them through social media and other platforms such as gaming consoles). In some schools, safeguarding resources were provided to pupils to support their understanding. One school would ensure their resources were appropriate for this purpose by asking their child protection officer to review them.

“We teach our pupils about safeguarding and give them safeguarding information cards for support. This helps them to understand potential dangers and the support they might need (e.g. websites and other resources) to stay safe from them.” – Secondary special school

Given the types of topics that are discussed as part of RSHE (e.g. relationships and mental and physical health), schools were aware that these lessons could give rise to pupils disclosing safeguarding issues. Schools felt it was therefore important that pupils knew in advance how disclosure would be handled – that is, the extent to which their confidentiality would be maintained and the support that would be available to them (both during and after the lesson). It was noted that all teachers, not just those who teach PSHE education, are trained to know what to do if a child raises a safeguarding concern.

“We would speak to them straight after, or if need be, if a child is upset during lesson, we would get the TA to take them out and have a chat with them outside the classroom to find out what’s wrong... There might be some issues that come up that we were not aware of. If something comes up that is a safeguarding concern, then we would listen and get in touch with our safeguarding team at the school. If there is a child protection issue, that would get flagged up straight away... It’s something that can happen in PSHE lessons.” – Primary school

²³ [Keeping Children Safe in Education \(KCSIE\)](#) sets out that all schools and colleges should ensure children are taught about safeguarding as part of providing a broad and balanced curriculum.

“I am on the safeguarding team and a lot of what we respond to comes out of PSHE lessons. For example, following a lesson on drugs a pupil shared something of concern relating to drugs, which led to them and their family being supported as a result.” – Secondary school

As mentioned, in some instances, the schools’ pastoral teams are already aware of potential safeguarding issues. In these circumstances, school staff can also support these pupils before these lessons. Additionally, schools discussed involving parents in this safeguarding process, which sometimes included providing whole-family support.

3.4. Key considerations for teaching specific RSHE topics

This report focuses on school practices in relation to how schools teach RSHE topics, rather than the specific content of these lessons. Although a range of personal and social topics are taught as part of this curriculum, it is recognised that practices around creating a safe learning environment that allows complex issues to be taught and handled safely and respectfully will be applicable across PSHE education (see sections 3.2 and 3.3 above for examples of these school practices). However, in addition to these practices, it is noted that there are specific considerations around teaching about areas such as mental health and wellbeing and promoting inclusivity of LGBT within the classroom and wider school environment; the following sections focus on the specific considerations for these two topics.

3.4.1. Mental health and wellbeing

When teaching about mental health and wellbeing, there was a shared understanding that schools needed to provide pupils with a language to talk about how they were feeling. Schools wanted to provide pupils with the appropriate language to talk about both their own mental health, as well as the mental health of others. Although this applied to both primary and secondary schools, the ways in which they approached this objective varied to reflect different levels of accessibility and understanding. For example, one primary school discussed with their pupils the five major emotions personified in an animated film (joy, sadness, fear, anger and disgust); this promoted a discussion around emotional awareness and there being “a scale of emotions”. In secondary schools, it was expressed that mental health and wellbeing is discussed “in a more matter of fact way”, because they have more experience and a greater understanding of emotions to draw on.

In addition to ensuring the narrative around mental health and wellbeing was age-appropriate, it was recognised that pupils with special educational needs may find it harder to express themselves through language. One of the primary special schools interviewed discussed using a range of different strategies, which allowed pupils to

choose the mode of communication that best suited their needs. These strategies included drawing faces in the sand (which supported the communication of children who were “more sensory”); using symbols in teaching (which provided an alternative to “confusing words”); and using pictures or actions, such as drawing or putting their face under the emoji showing how they are currently feeling (which provides non-verbal means of communicating).

By providing a shared language (or alternative mode of communication), schools felt that this helped normalise talking about your mental health and wellbeing with others. One school mentioned that these discussions were not just for PSHE lessons. Instead, schools consistently referenced adopting a whole-school approach to mental health and wellbeing, including but not limited to the PSHE education curriculum. Schools approached this in various ways, including marking the occasion of World Mental Health Day, having public displays promoting mental health and wellbeing around the school, and training staff and pupils as mental health ambassadors.

“On World Mental Health Day we spoke about how everybody feels low at different times, it might be a little bit low or really low, for a couple of days or longer. Talked about how it’s ok to feel low. How it’s ok to talk to someone. It’s not something that should be hidden.” – Primary school

As part of the whole-school approach, it was common for schools to discuss aiming to reduce the stigma attached to mental health. Strategies for achieving this included paying attention to the language used “so that mental health doesn’t necessarily have a negative connotation”. For example, a secondary school described teaching the topic of failure from a positive perspective. They used a story about an individual having a hard time coping and focused on what that person could do to help themselves feel better. This reframed the topic of failure, so that pupils were focusing on the promotion of positive mental health, rather than the experience of negative feelings. Notably, this school expressed that it was safer and easier for children to talk about a fictional character, rather than themselves or someone they knew; this encouraged an open discussion around healthy coping strategies.

Another approach schools commonly adopted to reduce the stigma of mental health was conveying the message that everyone experiences a range of emotions, teachers included. Some schools tied this conversation directly to the concept of resilience, which emphasised focusing on what pupils can do to “bounce back” or where to go for support if they are finding that challenging.

The strategies schools taught their pupils to support their mental health and wellbeing varied depending on pupils’ age and accessibility. For example, a primary special school highlighted that their pupils can struggle with how they are feeling, so they use co-

regulation to help the children identify what these feelings are, and use mindfulness as a means of calming the children's "anxiety monsters".

In mainstream primary schools, similar techniques were discussed. For example, one school taught their pupils breathing exercises and mindfulness, which was cited to "help children to relax, and feel calm and in control". This school felt these techniques were useful for managing feelings of anger or frustration, as well as behavioural problems. The interviewed primary schools also discussed providing pupils with strategies to manage "feeling a bit down". These strategies included talking about things they can do or already do that "makes them feel good", using visual aids (e.g. colourful cards with different techniques on them, such as "standing tall and proud", which teaches children to recognise the power of body language and the positive impact it can have on the way we feel), and encouraging children to sign "Take Care Event sheets" if they are having "a rough day" and need extra support, guidance or to talk to someone.

In some secondary schools, pupils took a more active role in supporting the wellbeing of their peers. For example, one school had a team of mental health and wellbeing ambassadors, comprising of pupils across all year groups. These pupils were trained by a specialist external provider and supervised by the Assistant Headteacher. Their role was described as helping promote a safe environment – not just in the classroom, but also in the wider school community – and knowing the sources of support available (e.g. the school nurse for discussions about contraception, or the Safeguarding Officer if they have any concerns around the safety of their peers). This school observed that there is "another stigma" specifically around boys talking about mental health. They noted that they are seeing an increasing number of male pupils sign up to be mental health and wellbeing ambassadors, which is helping to tackle that stigma: "if other pupils see more males, then more will come forward".

In secondary schools, it was also expressed that specific considerations need to be given to the teaching of topics that schools considered more serious (such as depression, anxiety, self-harm and suicide). For the topics of self-harm and suicide, schools emphasised taking care to ensure this content was taught in a way that avoided providing instructional detail, or inadvertently glamorising or encouraging this type of behaviour. In general, lessons covering these more serious topics were specifically structured to end on a more positive activity to lift the mood, enabling pupils to prepare themselves emotionally to move on to the next lesson.

To support the teaching of mental health and wellbeing, it was common for schools to organise specialist training for their teachers; it was noted that "teachers are not mental health professionals". For example, in one primary school, teachers were provided training on the topic of managing anxiety in children by their local child and adolescent mental health service (CAMHS). Some schools also recognised the potential impact of

teaching these topics on their teachers, and ensured that understanding this impact was part of the discussion around teaching mental health and wellbeing.

“You also need to be mindful of how it affects the teachers. We will have similar conversations with colleagues about how the topic area impacts them in case they have been through a similar issue.” – Secondary school

3.4.2. LGBT inclusion

In line with schools’ ground rules (e.g. to respect one another) and their whole-school policies towards appropriate behaviour (e.g. not condoning bullying and acts of discrimination), schools carefully considered how they taught pupils about people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT)²⁴, as well as gender identity more broadly.

As mentioned, when schools were planning and teaching RSHE, they worked closely with their pastoral teams to understand pupils’ personal and family situations; schools recognised that families come in many forms, and that there may be some pupils who are questioning or exploring their own sexual orientation or gender identity. To ensure the topic of relationships is handled sensitively, schools would often speak to families in advance. For example, one primary school described speaking with adoptive or LGBT parents ahead of teaching a lesson on different families. This gave them the opportunity to discuss the lesson plan, and to check that they were happy with the content and how it would be received by the child.

“There are things to take into consideration before delivering lessons. If the lesson is on different families for example, and we have children with adoptive parents or same-sex parents, we would possibly speak to the parents before.” - Primary school

In addition, schools thought carefully about the resources, such as the case study examples, they used. Across the interviews, schools ensured that their curriculum content included characters and figures from different cultures, backgrounds and types of households; one school described this as making “different stories visible”. This helped ensure pupils felt the lessons were relevant to them, and it helped children think about families that were different from their own. Where relevant, schools embedded LGBT experiences throughout the PSHE education curriculum and broader school curriculum,

²⁴ The DfE statutory guidance states schools should ensure that the needs of all pupils are appropriately met, and that all pupils understand the importance of equality and respect. At the point at which schools consider it appropriate to teach their pupils about LGBT, they should ensure that this content is fully integrated into their programmes of study for this area of the curriculum rather than delivered as a standalone unit or lesson (paragraphs 36 to 37).

weaving them into other lessons and activities (e.g. story time for younger pupils), rather than, for example, teaching LGBT as a stand-alone PSHE lesson. For example, one secondary school discussed teaching their pupils about the Stonewall riots in their history lessons.

“It should be naturally weaved in within sessions – children should see different families, cultures, religions...different backgrounds, sexual orientations and beliefs. It means children are thinking about what life is like in modern Britain”. – Primary school

In relation to this, schools consistently discussed aiming to use more inclusive language. A common example of this was teachers approaching conversations using gender-neutral terminology and pronouns. For example, in both primary and secondary schools, they were careful to refer to ‘parents’, as they recognised that some households had different family structures. In secondary schools, this gender-neutral approach also applied to relationships, where they referred to people’s partners rather than boyfriend or girlfriend. Schools highlighted that the use of inclusive language helped teach pupils the appropriate language to use when talking about different types of families and relationships, and helps promote normalising the conversation around differences.

“We try to get pupils used to the idea of characters [in scenarios] having gender-neutral names and pronouns, and it not being a big deal... Lessons on consent have examples with same sex relationships and gender-neutral names.” – Secondary school

In addition to ensuring inclusivity in the PSHE education curriculum, schools discussed their wider whole-school approach, including providing their pupils with the opportunity to talk to others in “a safe space”. This included school-based support, such as LGBT or Pride clubs, which pupils could attend to share their experiences, ask questions and “put the world to rights”. Student-led initiatives, such as having pupil LGBT advocates, worked well in raising awareness and giving other students the opportunity to speak with peers. For example, a secondary school had a “very active LGBT group” run by pupils; these pupils helped raise awareness by talking to other classes about gender identity. Another secondary school explained how staff who were open about their own sexuality ran their LGBT group, and that this had a big difference in making students feel comfortable discussing their own thoughts and feelings. In addition to these school-based activities, one secondary school described having a young person from a local LGBT support group²⁵ come in to offer one-to-one support to their pupils.

²⁵ The DfE statutory guidance sets out how schools should work with external organisations and states that schools are responsible for checking the visiting organisation’s credentials (paragraphs 51 to 53).

To further promote inclusivity and support LGBT pupils, schools discussed adopting a whole-school approach to LGBT inclusion. For example, schools provided inclusive spaces and facilities for pupils, such as gender-neutral toilets and a dedicated LGBT section in the library. Alongside this, schools discussed amending their policies to better reflect an inclusive learning environment, with many schools revisiting their anti-bullying policies to ensure these addressed how the school handles homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying, both through teaching and behaviour management.

“A large part of LGBT inclusion falls under bullying and online behaviours...we wanted to make it clear that gender, race, lifestyle choices are not to be chastised repeatedly, and that it is considered bullying by the school’s policy.” – Secondary school

Schools also commonly emphasised the importance of displaying LGBT inclusive symbols, such as a rainbow (Pride) flag, as a visual demonstration of their school’s whole-school approach to inclusivity. One secondary school described adding the rainbow flag to their school’s website as “probably the best thing that happened last year”; this school noted that they have since had pupils (who had previously experienced bullying because of their sexuality) move to their school because they saw the rainbow flag displayed on their website. Other schools displayed Pride flags outside of their school or had logos for LGBT inclusive groups.

Furthermore, staff training (e.g. on teaching different family dynamics) and specialist resources from LGBT organisations (e.g. a framework that supports schools to identify areas that could be improved in relation to positive LGBT, inclusion and visibility) also helped schools promote a whole-school approach to inclusivity. A common benefit of this training was learning about the impact of language and the appropriate terminology to use when teaching these topics; it was noted that this awareness supported teachers to promote inclusivity across the curriculum and wider school environment.

“It’s made all staff more aware of how to be more inclusive, including how to speak about things in lessons.” - Primary school

4. Challenges and success factors

The challenges schools faced fell into three main categories with some overlap between them: knowledge barriers, resource barriers, and systemic barriers. The main challenges discussed by schools are described below, with examples of factors that helped schools overcome the challenges faced.

4.1. Knowledge barriers

- **Training and knowledge sharing for PSHE:** Schools felt that there was a large gap in the amount of training for PSHE leads and teachers. For a subject that was often taught by many teachers across the school, PSHE leads felt it was essential to share knowledge and provide training, particularly around teaching sensitive topics. However, it was consistently reported that only the PSHE lead had attended training, or a small number of teachers. Schools often did not have the time available (which was often linked to the perception that PSHE was not a high priority for the school) to attend training and share their learning with other teachers, but schools that did allow time for teachers to reflect and feedback on training were able to amplify the value of attending training to other teachers across the school. Where schools joined local networks of schools and local organisations, this was a useful source of shared knowledge, experience and resources, but these networks were not established across all interviews.
- **Teacher confidence:** With PSHE being a diverse and fast-changing subject to teach, teachers with little experience of teaching PSHE and limited time to prepare tended to lack confidence in teaching PSHE topics. This was considered to be particularly true for topics such as drugs and online safety, where teachers felt they didn't have detailed and up-to-date knowledge to be able to answer pupils' questions in lessons. Lack of knowledge of the local context and pupil needs also made it difficult for lessons to be tailored to schools and individual classes. Having dedicated PSHE teachers to teach timetabled lessons helped to address this issue, through teachers building up their knowledge year on year of the PSHE curriculum and pupils' understanding of topics, as well as through establishing their own lesson plans and resources to reuse. Training and clear signposting to resources and information for teachers also helped to increase confidence and help ensure teachers chose sources of information and support wisely.
- **Assessing the quality of external organisations:** PSHE leads felt that they lacked guidance on how to determine when and how external organisations should be brought in to contribute to PSHE delivery, as well as how to assess the quality of their delivery. Schools discussed examples of working with external organisations with mixed results. Whilst some organisations delivered high quality teaching and provided a different perspective for pupils, challenges included

external organisations being unreliable and cancelling planned sessions at the last minute, low quality delivery, and logistical issues with fitting them into the PSHE timetable. Processes for going through and evaluating the content to be delivered by external organisations ahead of time helped to ensure teaching was of high quality, as well as using local networks to source delivery that other schools had found useful.

- **Knowledge of how to monitor and evaluate PSHE education:** Some schools lacked formal monitoring or evaluation of the PSHE curriculum, either due to a lack of knowledge of how best to approach this or due to a lack of time. Some PSHE leads went about monitoring delivery in their own time, but this was an informal process and relied on the PSHE lead's knowledge and experience. Where the SLT was more involved, this often placed more importance on monitoring and evaluating the curriculum, which placed greater accountability on PSHE leads and teachers to provide reports on development and progress.
- **Pupil assessment:** Some schools had limited understanding of how pupils should be assessed in PSHE education. Some felt that formal assessment such as written tests would put pressure on pupils for a subject where the main aim is to promote their wellbeing and prepare them for the opportunities and challenges of life, over and above purely academic achievement, but others recognised the need for assessment to monitor pupils' progress and ensure teaching was pitched appropriately.

4.2. Resource barriers

- **Physical equipment:** Some schools found it challenging to source sufficient quantities of the equipment or teaching aids they required for their RSHE lessons (e.g. sourcing enough condoms for teaching a year group of pupils every academic year). This challenge also falls into the knowledge gap category, as some schools did not know where to go for the physical resources they needed, rather than the resources not being available to them. Local networks and specialist PSHE education organisations online were often a useful starting point for where to look for physical resources. It should be noted, however, that the teaching of PSHE education requires relatively few physical resources; schools discussed teaching these subjects without the use of props.
- **Establishing resources / keeping resources up-to-date:** Creating materials from scratch was heavily time-consuming for schools, with the responsibility often falling to the PSHE lead to take on in their own time. Similarly, keeping resources up-to-date, especially for topics where the context and behaviours are often changing (e.g. online behaviour), was demanding. Both establishing and updating resources involved the PSHE lead or subject teachers extensively searching,

mainly online, for guidance and information about a topic. Without up-to-date resources, teacher confidence was impacted as they did not have the knowledge to be able to answer pupils' questions. As previously mentioned, sharing resources within a school and across networks of schools reduced the time and work needed to keep the PSHE curriculum up-to-date, though with recognition that there is always some necessary tailoring to the needs and circumstances of a particular school and its pupils. Also ensuring PSHE leads and teachers are properly trained will support them to plan effectively, and efficiently, and support them to draw on appropriate and trustworthy sources of support – e.g. lesson plans by external agencies on a given topic – as required.

- **Timetabling:** Schools often had limited time for PSHE education, either because of limited staff resource, or the perception that there was a lack of SLT support, or they had a school culture that did not prioritise PSHE education. As previously mentioned, this impacted on the quality of PSHE teaching due to a variety of different teachers being involved with varied familiarity and levels of experience teaching PSHE education, and due to not having enough time to cover PSHE topics regularly in a planned and sequenced way.
- **Resources for special schools:** Special schools highlighted the distinct needs of their pupils, and the need for PSHE teachers to make significant adaptations to resources for their pupils. This was time-consuming for teachers and in some cases difficult to ensure that all aspects of the PSHE education curriculum were covered in an appropriate way.

4.3. Systemic barriers

- **School culture:** How established and embedded PSHE education was in the school curriculum and culture had an impact on the priority afforded to PSHE. Schools with a long-standing, established PSHE curriculum tended to describe how aspects of PSHE filtered through the rest of the school curriculum and culture, making pupils and teachers feel more comfortable talking about PSHE topics.
- **SLT support:** Linked to school culture, SLT support was key in determining the school's approach to PSHE education, including the time, resources and delivery model for the subject. Schools who felt they had less SLT support expressed the subject was last on the list of priorities and struggled to enact changes that they felt would improve their school's PSHE education. Some PSHE leads pointed out that the new statutory requirements were helping with engaging the SLT in improving their school's PSHE education by placing renewed importance on reviewing the PSHE curriculum.

- **Parental engagement:** Although this was not an extensive issue for the schools interviewed, some had experienced resistance from parents to PSHE teaching, and specifically to the new requirements. Schools that proactively engaged parents in the PSHE education curriculum (e.g. informing parents of the curriculum ahead of time) found that issues could normally be resolved by speaking to parents face to face and explaining what their child would be taught and why.
- **Other curriculum changes:** All schools were having to manage competing priorities, including changes to other parts of the school curriculum. Even in schools where PSHE education was perceived as highly valued, the time and resources needed for PSHE had to be balanced with those needed for other subjects.

Appendix

Appendix 1: Achieved sample

In total, 30 PSHE leads (representing 30 schools) were interviewed. The table below shows a breakdown of the achieved sample of schools, with quotas shown in brackets.

Schools		Primary	Secondary
TOTAL		12 (12)	18 (18)
School	LA maintained	5 (4)	6 (6)
	Academy	4 (3)	9 (6)
	Special	3 (1)	1 (1)
Type	Faith	5 (1)	1 (1)
	Selective	N/A	3 (1)
	Single sex (boys)	N/A	1 (1)
	Single sex (girls)	N/A	4 (1)
Urban/Rural	Urban	8 (4)	11 (6)
	Rural	4 (4)	7 (6)
Size (Mix)	Small	8	9
	Medium	1	5
	Large	3	4
FSM (Mix)	Small	3	8
	Medium	6	5
	Large	3	5

Appendix 2: Topics of interest for the research

The following topics were listed as part of the recruitment screener. Schools were asked to indicate which of these topics they felt they could share clear examples of how their school effectively addresses the topic.

	Topic
1	School-led examples of CPD
2	Working with external agencies
3	Working with parents
4	Overall approach to teaching sensitive topics
5	Teaching mental wellbeing, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary: Emotions • Secondary: common mental ill health, sensitive topics (e.g. self-harm, eating disorders)
6	Teaching about internet safety and harms, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary: Sexting and porn • Secondary: Pornography
7	Teaching about drugs
8	Teaching health education, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary: Puberty • First aid
9	Teaching about relationships, including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Primary: Teaching pupils about different family units • Secondary: Teaching about sexual intimacy • Considerations for LGBT inclusivity when teaching these subjects • Anti-bullying

Appendix 3: A list of DfE resources

Response to call for evidence (includes list of stakeholders)

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/changes-to-teaching-of-sex-and-relationship-education-and-pshe>

RSHE statutory guidance

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-education-relationships-and-sex-education-rse-and-health-education>

Leaflets for schools to provide to parents

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/relationships-sex-and-health-education-guides-for-schools>.

Advice for primary schools on engaging parents

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/engaging-parents-with-relationships-education-policy>.

RSHE support package

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-relationships-sex-and-health>

Plan your relationships, sex and health curriculum

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/plan-your-relationships-sex-and-health-curriculum>

Training modules

<https://www.gov.uk/guidance/teaching-about-relationships-sex-and-health#train-teachers-on-relationships-sex-and-health-education>



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