



Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State

Sanctuary Buildings Great Smith Street Westminster London SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Paul Whiteman
General Secretary
NAHT
1 Heath Square
Boltro Road
Haywards Heath
West Sussex
RH16 1BL

09 APR 2019

Dear Paul,

I am writing following your recent conversations with various officials in my department regarding relationships and sex education (RSE). I understand that there was a useful meeting with the Director General for Early Years and Schools on 4 April 2019. I thought it would be useful to write to you setting out my thinking on equalities, and on the forthcoming introduction of compulsory relationships education in primary schools.

I should start by saying that at the heart of my vision for the education system is a strong belief in school autonomy. Head teachers across the country do a fantastic job of leading their schools, and I want to make sure that they, as the people who best know their pupils and communities, are supported to do their jobs. Alongside that, I recognise that the issues we have seen in Birmingham in recent weeks are ones that people feel very strongly about, and building consensus is not always easy. I have found the reports of teachers feeling intimidated very concerning and my department is supporting the dialogue between the school and parents to find a way forward.

I want all children to leave school prepared for life in modern, diverse Britain. Over the last few years the government has taken significant steps to ensure that this is central to the work that schools do. In 2014, we introduced a requirement for all schools to promote the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. In addition, schools are required to comply with relevant requirements of the Equality Act 2010, although the content of the school curriculum is exempt from the duties imposed on schools by Part 6 of the Act. They must comply with the Public Sector Equality Duty, which means, in making decisions, having due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under the Equality Act, and to advance equality of opportunity

and foster good relations between people who share a relevant protected characteristic and people who do not share it. The PSED is important because it ensures that head teachers, in taking decisions about the running of their schools, take equalities issues fully into account.

A core part of preparing children for life in modern Britain is ensuring they understand the world in which they are growing up. The world for our young people looks very different than it did 20 years ago, when we last made changes to health, relationships and sex education. For the first time, from September 2020, relationships education will be compulsory for all primary pupils and relationships and sex education will be compulsory for all secondary pupils. This is a significant change, and one which we want to support schools to get right. This is why we have a budget of £6m for 2019-20 for relationships, sex and health education implementation to deliver a supplementary guide; targeted support on materials; and training. There are many elements to this policy change, but one of the key ones is developing young people's understanding of the importance of healthy and respectful relationships with all people.

Our policies on fundamental British values and relationships education, as well as the Public Sector Equalities Duty, complement and build on one another. We all share the aim of ensuring we have schools which contribute to children's understanding of the world around them and foster their respect of people who seem different from them. In developing our relationships, sex and health education policy, we have consulted widely and are conscious that there are a variety of different views, sometimes held in tension. We have therefore deliberately sought to provide a clear direction of travel, while also allowing headteachers discretion. For example, we have been clear that pupils should receive teaching on LGBT relationships during their school years - we expect secondary schools to include LGBT content. Primary schools are enabled and encouraged to cover LGBT content if they consider it age appropriate to do so.

A hugely important part of education is learning to live together – to understand one another and appreciate one another. This understanding and appreciation is achieved through dialogue, which is why we are requiring schools to consult with parents about their policies for these subjects. Parents and carers are the primary educators of their children, and it is right that they are involved in developing how schools deliver relationships education.

Key to an effective consultation is space and time for parents to input, ask questions and share concerns, and for the school to decide the way forward. What is taught, and how, is ultimately a decision for the school. Central to the government's entire education policy is trust for professionals – and we trust and support head teachers to make decisions that are in the best interests of their pupils. The consultation requirements are to ensure schools are listening and understanding the views of parents, and considering these when making decisions about their relationships education curriculum. Consultation also provides an opportunity for parents to understand and ask questions about the school's approach and help increase confidence in the curriculum. It is important, as with so many aspects of school life, for schools and parents to work together, listening and building broad consensus. Schools across the country will already be teaching children about the importance of kindness,

respecting difference and treating everyone equally. I would expect this work to continue, though where the content of this teaching overlaps with relationships education and the topics referenced in the relationships education and RSE guidance, schools must consult with parents. Although the relationships, sex and health education requirements don't come into force until September 2020, many schools might want to start consulting now.

Once an approach has been established, school leaders need to retain the ability to amend this as circumstances change. For example, if they have decided on an age to introduce teaching about LGBT but then become aware, in a younger age group, of a particular issue with homophobic bullying that needs addressing, or have a younger child who has same sex parents join the school, they may change their approach. In addition, irrespective of the agreed relationships curriculum, I would expect the school to address these issues, to prioritise the care and safety of children, and to eliminate discrimination.

Whilst consultation on relationships education and RSE is important, head teachers need to be able to respond to what is happening in their school, and in making decisions, taking into account the considerations in the PSED, give consideration to all protected characteristics. It is regrettable that myths and misinformation about the forthcoming relationships education changes in primary schools, circulated often by individuals with no links to the education system, are undermining the hard work of head teachers, and the legitimate right of parents to be consulted on what their children are being taught about relationships. It is important that we continue to work hard, in partnership with you, to dispel myths and reinforce the fact that these important changes to relationships education (and RSE) will ensure all children learn about the wide variety of relationships in society throughout their school careers.

I want to reassure you and the members you represent that consultation does not provide a parental veto on curriculum content. We want schools to consult parents, listen to their views, and make reasonable decisions about how to proceed (including through consideration of their wider duties) – and we will support them in this. We trust school leaders and teachers to make the right professional choices and act reasonably when considering consultation feedback, and are clear that dedicated public servants faithfully discharging their duty have an absolute right to feel confident and safe.

I want to see all schools across the country delivering high quality education that ensures all young people feel included and that ensures that children grow up understanding the value and importance of kindness and respect for others and themselves. I look forward to the Department and NAHT continuing to discuss these matters, so that we can work together in supporting head teachers to deliver the best for children.

I am pleased that my department and the NAHT will continue to work together to establish the right practical support for school leaders facing difficult circumstances as a result of any local controversy because of the approach to relationships education and RSE.

Sincerely
Damian Hinds

Damian Hinds
Secretary of State for Education