

“Positive step for LGBT inclusion” as RSHE guidance published

The importance of children learning to respect each other from the earliest age has been underlined by the Education Secretary Damian Hinds, as the government publishes the final guidance for schools on relationships, sex and health education.

Stonewall has welcomed the “real, positive step forward for LGBT inclusion in England’s schools” as the Department for Education publishes [guidance](#) to help ensure children have the knowledge they need to grow up healthy, happy and safe.

It comes ahead of the introduction of compulsory relationships education for primary-age pupils and compulsory relationships and sex education (RSE) for secondary-age pupils, and compulsory health education for all pupils in state-funded schools from September 2020.

Following a speech to launch School Diversity Week 2019 last night, Mr Hinds has also committed to convening an expert group to support the effective implementation of these new subjects in schools. This group will include teaching unions such as the NAHT, sector experts, representatives of faith groups, parents and young people.

Education Secretary, Damian Hinds said:

At the heart of preparing children for life in modern Britain is making sure that they understand the world they are growing up in. It is a world that is different from 20 years ago, when this guidance was last updated, and this is a significant step that will help young people to look after themselves and each other.

A wide range of views were expressed during the public consultation, and I believe the guidance strikes the right balance. Our new guidance is clear that children should leave school having learnt about LGBT relationships.

Children will of course find out about all sorts of things, including the diversity of our society, anyway – the question is where and how is it best to do so – in class, on the internet, or in the playground. I would strongly encourage schools to discuss with children in class that there are all sorts of different, strong and loving families, including families with same-sex parents, while they are at primary school.

There is no reason why teaching children about the society that we live in and the different types of loving, healthy relationships that exist cannot be done in a way that respects everyone.

Ruth Hunt, Chief Executive, Stonewall said:

The new Relationships and Sex Education guidance is a real, positive step forward for LGBT inclusion in England's schools. By teaching about LGBT families in primary Relationships Education and building on this work in secondary Relationships and Sex Education, schools are helping prepare young people for life in 21st century Britain. Teaching about the diversity that exists in the world means children from all families feel included and helps every child and young person understand that LGBT people are part of normal, everyday life.

Stonewall was founded 30 years ago in response to Section 28 – the crushing legislation that banned schools from 'promoting homosexuality'. Teachers were effectively stopped from talking about same-sex relationships and properly supporting students who may have been questioning their sexuality. It was a dark era that we promised never to be repeated. This guidance is a historic achievement that will change the way LGBT families, people and relationships are taught. We look forward to working with our network of primary and secondary schools to build on this good practice, and we hope to see LGBT inclusion strengthened even further when the guidance is next updated in 2022.

Paul Whiteman, general secretary of the NAHT, said:

The Secretary of State has now made it abundantly clear that it is appropriate to teach primary-age children that there are different kinds of relationships, and that not every family is the same.

As the Secretary of State has said, it is important that from the earliest age children learn to have respect for each other and to know that everybody is equal. We agree that diversity and equality are a matter of fact and a matter of law and learning about equality and diversity is not optional.

The Secretary of State has strongly encouraged every primary school to continue what they are already doing – to teach about relationships in an inclusive way. Today's statement is a clear signal to schools, that when it comes to talking to pupils about the different kinds of families and relationships they may encounter in their lives, it's a question of 'when' and not 'if'.

We will continue to work alongside the schools where we have seen protests and objections, to help everyone involved restore a peaceful and productive teaching and learning environment. Dedicated public servants faithfully discharging their duty have an absolute right to feel confident and safe, pupils should never have to walk past noisy and aggressive protests on their way to school.

Making health education universally compulsory and updating relationships and sex education guidance for the first time since 2000 will ensure young people are prepared for the opportunities and challenges of a modern world, both on- and offline.

From September this year, early-adopter schools will begin teaching the new content, to support schools across the country as they do so the Department for Education will shortly publish details of a working group to offer insight into the introduction of the guidance ahead of the nationwide roll-out in 2020.

The Department for Education will also provide schools with ongoing support as they prepare to teach these subjects, including explanatory guides for parents published today.

At primary age, the new guidance will mean children will learn about healthy relationships in an age-appropriate way, plus other topics, including:

- how to treat each other with kindness, consideration and respect,
- that mental wellbeing is a normal part of daily life and why simple self-care – like getting enough sleep and spending time outdoors and with friends – is important,
- the importance of staying active, and recognising the early signs of physical illness – ensuring pupils understand how mental and physical health are linked, and
- age-appropriate online safety – including what to do if they come across things they are uncomfortable with, the importance of respect for others even when posting anonymously, and the risks of talking to people on the internet that they don't know in real life.

At secondary, pupils will build on topics taught at primary age with a range of new content to ensure young people know how to look after their physical and mental health, including:

- what healthy and unhealthy relationships look like and what makes a good friend, colleague and successful marriage or committed relationship,
- ensuring pupils can spot the signs of common mental illnesses such as anxiety and depression in themselves or others,
- At the appropriate time, developing intimate relationships and making safe, informed and healthy choices,
- how to discuss emotions accurately and sensitively,
- the impact of alcohol and drugs on physical and mental health, and how to access professional help, and
- online safety topics, including the serious risks of sharing private photos, the impact of viewing explicit or harmful content – including how to report it and get support – as well as how the internet can sometimes promote an unhealthy view of sex and relationships.

The new guidance was published alongside the regulations for these subjects, which passed through parliament earlier this year, and was developed following an extensive call for evidence and three-month consultation on the draft regulations and guidance.