

**DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM AND ASSESSMENT**  
**Raymond Caldwell**



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7 August 2023

Dear Principal,

### **Relationship and Sexuality Education (RSE) – False Information Campaign**

I appreciate that schools are currently closed for the summer, but that you may be receiving communications from a false information campaign that is circulating to parents in relation to RSE; therefore, I am writing to you now and will re-issue this correspondence at the end of August.

My letter of 28 June 2023 advised that the Secretary of State made Regulations to amend the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order 2007 (Northern Ireland) (“the Order”) to add additional topics to the RSE curriculum at Key Stages 3 and 4. The Regulations came into force on 1 July and will apply from the 2023-24 school year onwards. Your school may already be addressing these elements through your taught RSE programme; however, there is **no expectation** that you would do so ahead of the Department issuing Guidance accompanied by support materials before the commencement date of 1 January 2024.

The change to legislation brought in by the Secretary of State **does not apply to primary schools**. It applies only to specific elements of the RSE curriculum at post-primary, namely that:

“The curriculum for every grant-aided school shall, **in relation to key stages 3 and 4, include age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.**”

The Regulations also **make provision for**, at the request of a parent, **a pupil to be excused from RSE lessons that contain age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.**

All grant-aided schools are required to have a RSE policy based on the ethos of their school, subject to consultation with parents and pupils, that should be kept under review to inform their taught RSE programme. RSE forms a statutory component of

the following key areas of learning, as set out in the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) (Northern Ireland) Order 2007:

- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding (PDMU) in the primary curriculum;
- Personal Development and Home Economics statements of requirement for Key Stage 3; and
- Personal Development strand of Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at Key Stage 4.

Issues relating to RSE may also be taught through other subjects including religious education (ethics), biology (the body and reproduction) and history (assessment of the treatment of minorities in the past compared to now). The Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA) provides resources to support the teaching and learning of RSE through a published [RSE Progression Framework](#) for Years 1 to 14 and [RSE Hub](#). CCEA keep the RSE Progression Framework and Hub under review. In keeping with the design principles of the Northern Ireland Curriculum, schools have flexibility to decide on the content of their taught RSE programme and how to deliver it.

Officials have already commenced work on a full public consultation that will address specifically the Secretary of State's Regulations, and more generally the recommendations from the recent Education and Training Inspectorate's (ETI) thematic evaluation of the preventative curriculum in schools and EOTAS centres and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission report on the provision of RSE in schools. Once the consultation is launched, I would encourage all interested parties to make a response. Following the consultation, the Department will publish guidance to support the delivery of RSE in grant-aided schools.

The Department has updated its website to reflect these latest developments and will continue to provide updated information, which can be found at <https://www.education-ni.gov.uk/articles/relationship-and-sexuality-education-rse>.

I will write to you again at the end of August to advise of the launch of the consultation. If in the meantime you have any queries, please do not hesitate to contact the Curriculum Team at [CAT@education-ni.gov.uk](mailto:CAT@education-ni.gov.uk).

Yours faithfully



**RAYMOND CALDWELL**  
Director of Curriculum and Assessment