



Focus On...

Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE): Are we getting it right?

"We are not all in the same boat. We are all in the same storm." [\(Damien Barr\)](#)

There is one absolute certainty from the last two years and that is that everyone's lived experience of the same storm has been different. Learning and understanding the lived experiences of the 'storm' for all children and young people is something we are still navigating on a daily basis. Trying to comprehend the impact of their experiences is key to us being able to help them continue to develop and thrive as they grow.

Finding ways to develop the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to navigate their lives in an ever-changing world, has always sat within the equally, ever-changing world of PSHE and safeguarding. Whilst PSHE has morphed into various titles (RSE, RHE etc.), it still remains a crucial aspect within the curriculum. No matter how many times the name of the subject changes, there are some absolutes that remain - absolutes that we must address.

What is it that our children and young people want from their RSHE curriculum?

Whilst this may seem a simple question to answer, children and young people continue to tell us that we are not getting it right:

- Recent research from the [Sex Education Forum](#) provides a wealth of information from the voices of young people.
- [Previous Ofsted reports](#) on PSHE tell us that the provision is 'not yet good enough'.
- The Department for Education (DfE) and Ofsted report '[Sexual violence and harassment between children in schools and colleges](#)' stated that pupils feel RSHE does not cover the learning that they need or is not relevant and current.
- The '[Transforming School Cultures Project](#)', undertaken by Surrey University and research partners, is a programme where young people explain how they would like RSE to be adapted to more aptly suit their daily lives.
- Alice Hoyle writes about long standing concerns regarding the use of correct and safe terminology in schools in the [following article](#).

So, what does this mean for us? What does effective RSHE look like?

The introduction of RSHE as a statutory subject in 2020 and the ever-increasing references to a 'safeguarding curriculum' in Keeping Children Safe In Education, indicates the existence of an absolute; all settings are facing the development and embedding of a curriculum subject in which most professionals have no training.

When considering the development of effective and needs based RSHE provision, the DfE use phrases such as '*it's an iterative process*' and '*a one size fits all may not be appropriate*'. But what does this mean for each individual setting? How can we develop meaningful and effective provision amongst everything else?

Ofsted are very clear that settings must be able to identify how they have gathered stakeholder information (pupils and parents) as part of their RSHE development. This stakeholder information should then be reflected in both policy and practice.



They are also very clear that RSHE underpins safeguarding in schools and maintain a particular focus on how RSE supports schools approaches to addressing all levels of sexual violence and harassment in schools. The lived and articulated experiences of children and young people are a key measure in this agenda.

Where do we start and what might that look like?

With all of these considerations, we might conclude that the lived experience of pupils should be at the core of everything we do. We might ask ourselves:

'How do we listen to what children and young people say they need and how do we match what the adults think they need with the real lived experiences of these young people to develop a needs-based unique approach in our school?'

If we want pupils to be critical thinkers, then maybe that's where we, as adults, can start:

- What do we know about our pupils?
- What do we know about where they are growing up?
- What do they feel are their challenges?
- What do they want to know about?
- What do they want to be able to do?
- How do they want to learn all of this?

Co-production is key to great RSHE. All of the evidence suggests this and there is a wealth of information and resource to prompt thinking, promote reflection and assist all settings on their journey. Some great places to start include:

- engaging in a professionals' network (WSCC RSHE networks are available termly);
- exploring some of the latest research and considering how it reflects on your own practice;
- engaging in meaningful consultation with pupils and parents;
- carrying out staff consultation to scope their views and needs;
- considering local contextual and internal data;
- exploring and working within the West Sussex Education for Safeguarding (E4S) approach to support all of these areas. E4S provides all of the tools, training and resources schools may wish to use.

News about access to [E4S](#) for all schools will be released shortly.

Of all these absolutes, getting it right for the children and young people of today is at the core of all we do. Hearing voices that say 'that was exactly what I needed' because of that learning I can now...' is what we are all striving for.

Effective and coproduced RSHE will help safeguard our children, providing them with the knowledge, skills and understanding they need to equip themselves both now and in the future.