

DIRECTOR OF CURRICULUM, ASSESSMENT, TEACHER EDUCATION AND PROFESSIONAL LEARNING

Raymond Caldwell



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22 September 2023

Dear Principal

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION (RSE) – MISINFORMATION CAMPAIGN

I wrote previously to you on 7 August and 1 September about a campaign that is circulating to parents/carers in relation to RSE. Since then, there has been ongoing activity on social media and public demonstrations against the teaching of RSE in schools, resulting in the circulation of misinformation. This campaign is clearly upsetting for parents and carers and does a disservice to the thousands of teachers who work hard every day to deliver a quality education for all our children and young people, including teaching them about RSE.

The protests appear to stem from a misperception that the recent changes to the statutory curriculum at Key Stages (KS) 3 and 4 signal a wider redrafting of the RSE curriculum which, it is claimed, has the potential to harm children and young people particularly those in primary schools. This is clearly not the case, as I have previously outlined, but will do so again for clarity.

The change to legislation brought in by the Secretary of State from 1 July 2023 **does not apply to primary schools**. It applies only to specific elements of the RSE curriculum at KS3 and KS4 in post-primary schools, 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 require the Department to make provision for, at the request of a parent/carer of a pupil in KS3 and KS4 to be excused from [RSE] education 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 or an element of it (as may be determined by the Department).

The Department launched a 12-week consultation on this aspect of the changes on 1 September 2023 which will run to 24 November. I want to re-emphasise that the consultation relates only to the circumstances in which a parent/carer can request to have their child excused from the specific aspect(s) of RSE associated with the change in legislation.

A copy of the consultation can be downloaded or completed online via [Relationships and Sexuality Education \(RSE\) Consultation | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://education-ni.gov.uk/relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse-consultation) I would be grateful if you would share this with parents/carers and pupils and encourage them to take the opportunity to give their views to inform the Department in finalising the regulations it is required to make and in developing guidance.

In order to address the concerns of parents/carers, the Department will be communicating to them through an information leaflet and using social media. We have developed the attached information for parents/carers which includes Frequently Asked Questions; this will be kept under review and updated as required. I would also be grateful if you could share this information with parents/carers. This information is also available at [RSE | Department of Education \(education-ni.gov.uk\)](https://education-ni.gov.uk/rse).

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "R. Caldwell". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "R".

RAYMOND CALDWELL
Director of Curriculum, Assessment, Teacher Education and Professional Learning