



The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister for Schools

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Rt Hon Caroline Nokes MP
By email: caroline.nokes.mp@parliament.uk

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Dear Caroline,

I understand that the Women and Equalities Select Committee is taking evidence in relation to the Government's review of the statutory guidance on Relationships, Sex and Health Education. I will of course respond to the Committee's report in due course, but I thought that I should write to set out the context for the review.

Relationships, sex and health education (RSHE) became statutory subjects in September 2020. The Government set out the content that schools should teach in the [statutory guidance](#), and committed to review it three years from first teaching and every three years subsequently. The review will consider whether the subject content remains relevant and appropriate and how the guidance covers safeguards in relation to its teaching.

The Department's aim is to engage with a range of experts and interested parties, including parents and children, before issuing revised guidance for full public consultation in the Autumn, in order to allow revised guidance to be published early in 2024. The revised guidance will also take into account the results of a national survey of RSHE, which is being undertaken independently by IFF Research. In the course of this work the Department will be looking more closely at some areas where there is already an emerging case for change, which are set out below.

Areas of focus

Ensuring age-appropriate sex and relationships education

On 31 March, the Department announced that the review will be informed by an independent panel of experts, which will consider how to put in place safeguards to stop pupils from being taught content that could be damaging. Their advice will include options for introducing age ratings, setting out what is appropriate to be taught at what age, to prevent children being exposed to concepts they are too young to understand. The aim will be for the panel to advise to the Government by September so their conclusions can be included in the amended guidance ahead of consultation.

The Secretary of State is in the process of appointing the panel, and we will announce the final members shortly.

The review will also draw on close work with Ofsted, to gather evidence to help us understand what topics schools are teaching to different age groups and what material is being used in the classroom. We will also continue to work with the Children's Commissioner to ensure the views of children can feed into the review in a safe and appropriate way.

Preventing mental health problems, including suicide

The subject content for RSHE already contains a good deal of content on mental health and seeking help for problems, which is central to preventing the escalation of issues and preventing suicide. Under the current guidance schools can choose to teach older pupils about suicide in an age-appropriate and sensitive way, but it must be approached in a way that does not expose pupils to concepts that are instructive rather than preventative or lead to them seeking out websites that provide methods of self-harm or suicide. We will consider whether this can be strengthened with more specific coverage of topics such as suicide.

Parallel work

Addressing attitudes relating to sexual harassment and sexual violence

The Department is continuing to develop more detailed non-statutory guidance to support schools to teach about sexual harassment and sexual violence effectively, which was a commitment made as part of the wider Tackling Violence against Women and Girls strategy. We have already commissioned an independent literature review and user research, as well as gathering views from a range of experts. We will consider the final version of the guidance in the context of the wider review to ensure consistency, as many of the topics covered will be age sensitive.

Non-statutory guidance for schools on supporting pupils who are questioning their gender

You will be aware that the Department is also developing non-statutory guidance to help schools and colleges support pupils who are questioning their gender. This guidance is being developed to a shorter timetable and we are planning to consult on a draft version in the coming weeks. This guidance will include advice to schools about teaching about gender identity in RSHE, so we will take steps to ensure that both sets of guidance are fully aligned.

Oak National Academy

[Oak National Academy](#), the independent provider of freely available online curriculum and lesson resources, will be developing curriculum materials to make sure every school can access high-quality, compliant resources which will build on what is already available for schools. This will include RSHE resources to help support teachers as they develop their curriculum and lesson planning in this sensitive area. We expect that this work will be underway by the end of the year

and that materials will start to become available towards the end of 2024. I hope that this letter is helpful in setting out the Department's plans for the review of the RSHE statutory guidance to inform your consideration. I will of course welcome the views of the Committee and be happy to provide a further update once the work has reached some conclusions.

I would be happy to meet with the Women and Equalities Select Committee in the Autumn to discuss further.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick', written in a cursive style.

The Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
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