

## **BHA briefing: Relationships and Sex Education and ‘faith’ school opt outs in the Children and Social Work Bill**

06 March 2017



### **Overview**

The Government has introduced amendments to the Children and Social Work Bill (new clauses 15 and 16) that proposes to make Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) compulsory in all schools. This is a very positive step in the right direction and will go a long way towards ensuring that children receive the comprehensive, age-appropriate RSE to which they are entitled. **The amendments will be considered at report stage on Tuesday 07 March 2017.**

However, contained within the Government’s proposals - Section 3(b) of new clause 15 - is [a requirement](#) that any RSE provided in schools must be ‘appropriate having regard to...the religious background of the pupils’. And in the [written ministerial statement](#) announcing the move, the Department for Education states that ‘faith schools will continue to be able to teach in accordance with the tenets of their faith.’ **The Government must make clear that this is in no way an invitation to schools to shirk their obligation to provide children with comprehensive, accurate, and evidence-based information in the range of areas covered in RSE, nor to neglect their responsibilities under the Equality Act 2010.**

It is this latter issue upon which the rest of this briefing focuses.

### **The requirements for RSE should be the same in all schools, including religious schools**

**A child’s access to accurate, evidence-based information about relationships and sex should not be determined by their religious or non-religious background, nor by the type of school to which they happen to have been sent.** If all children have a right to comprehensive, age-appropriate RSE, as the Government maintains they do, then all children must have access to it. To allow certain types of school to opt out of this teaching, as is proposed, is either to declare that no such right exists, or to endorse the widespread violation of that right.

Whether or not children have a right to this information, however, all the evidence suggests that high-quality RSE leads to the best outcomes in terms of improving sexual health, reducing unwanted pregnancy, challenging gender stereotypes, educating about consent, protecting children from abuse, and tackling homophobic and transphobic bullying. Given the benefits of RSE to the wellbeing of pupils, it is simply not appropriate to be providing it to some whilst denying it to others.

Furthermore, relationships and sex education is concerned with equipping children to engage in respectful relationships, to challenge and be resilient to damaging gender stereotypes and other discriminatory attitudes, and ultimately to stay safe and healthy. As such, it must be relevant to them and to the choices they are free to make. Clearly, if RSE in all types of schools is not fully LGBT-inclusive, if it withholds information or passes judgment on the various forms of family relationship conducive to individual and collective fulfilment, or if it presumes the availability of only a limited

range of options for staying safe within relationships, sexual or otherwise, then it fails children and young people. This is not acceptable.

### **Examples of bad practice in faith-based RSE**

Whilst some 'faith' schools already provide accurate and evidence-based RSE, giving 'faith' schools free reign to teach whatever RSE they choose is demonstrably problematic.

Only last year, for instance, we found that the '[Education for Personal Relationships Policy](#)' of a state Catholic school in Basingstoke stated that 'Since the Church has always taught that sexual love should always find its true place in marriage, a homosexual partnership and a heterosexual marriage can never be equated. This is the case in English law. The Church seeks to affirm the homosexual as a person, but cannot approve of homosexual genital acts.' Christian sex education provider Lovewise, has [taught children](#), among other things, that 'most rape victims regret abortion', that 'abortions drastically increase the risk of depression and suicide', and the homosexuality is 'damaging to mind, body and spirit'. LIFE, which provides sex education resources for schools, state [on their website](#) that 'condoms are ineffective as a prevention technique for [sexually transmitted] diseases'. And anti-abortion group SPUC has been exposed giving [school talks to pupils](#) in which they state that abortion increases a woman's risk of breast cancer and can lead to 'suicidal tendencies' and 'drug and alcohol abuse'.

**The Government must make clear that it is not acceptable to deliver RSE in this way and it must be explicit in stating that RSE should provide students with accurate, unbiased information about contraception, STIs, abortion, gender identity, and sexual orientation, among other topics.**

**If you are able to help us by raising these issues during the report stage on Tuesday 07 March 2017 please let us know. Even at this late notice we would be happy to provide lines or draft contributions on your behalf.**

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