

Summary of: The Implementation of the 2020 curriculum guidance in school

**Warwickshire RSHE Network: Education Guidance**

Created by Catherine Winton

RSHE Lead | Connect for Health

September 2024

**Relationships, Sex and Health Education**

Implementation of the 2020 curriculum guidance in school

September 2024

The 2024 RSHE implementation report sheds light on how schools are engaging with the statutory 2020 curriculum guidance and provides insights into areas of success as well as ongoing challenges. The research, conducted by IFF Research for the Department for Education (DfE), involved extensive quantitative and qualitative analysis, drawing on responses from over 2,500 school staff and case studies from 14 schools. Here are key takeaways and suggested steps for moving forward:

**Key Lessons Learned**

**Effective Use of Statutory Guidance:** The DfE's guidance, developed to aid schools in creating tailored RSHE programs, saw high levels of awareness among school leaders and RSHE coordinators, with 99% of leaders and 98% of coordinators familiar with it. However, fewer teachers directly engaged with the guidance, often viewing it as the responsibility of the RSHE coordinator. While this "cascade model" has been effective to some extent, it raises questions about how well-equipped teachers are with firsthand understanding of the guidance, which may impact their ability to address diverse pupil needs fully.

**Training and Teacher Confidence:** Despite statutory requirements, teachers’ confidence in delivering RSHE varied. While most felt confident on foundational topics, there was a noticeable demand for additional training in more challenging areas such as mental wellbeing and inclusive education, particularly on LGBT+ topics. The limited training teachers received, coupled with a lack of external networking opportunities, indicates that more formalised and frequent training and peer support structures are necessary to build confidence and competence.

**Parental Engagement**: Although the majority of school leaders reported consulting parents during the curriculum design process, the report notes that this engagement was often informal. Additionally, over a quarter of teachers were unsure of parents' support levels, revealing a gap in systematic, meaningful engagement. Given the parental role in supporting RSHE’s effectiveness, schools could benefit from establishing more structured parental consultation methods.

**Pupil Engagement and Curriculum Adaptation**: Schools implemented a variety of approaches to engage pupils, yet the report found that pupils often did not recognise informal consultations as meaningful input into the curriculum. This disconnect suggests a need for schools to consider more formalised methods of gathering student input and to emphasise the impact of their feedback on lesson planning.

**Timetabling and Resource Constraints**: Schools reported challenges in allocating sufficient time for RSHE amidst a crowded curriculum. While 97% of schools delivered RSHE through timetabled lessons, the pressures of incorporating all required content were evident, particularly for smaller and non-mainstream schools such as Pupil Referral Units (PRUs) and Alternative Providers (APs), which highlighted a need for specialized support and additional resources.

**Suggested Ways Forward**

**Enhanced and Ongoing Training Programs**: Schools should prioritise regular, comprehensive training on RSHE topics, especially in sensitive or challenging areas. Resources could focus on equipping teachers with skills to handle complex issues confidently and appropriately. Developing a central repository of materials and ensuring teachers have direct access would aid in maintaining consistency across schools.

**Structured Parental Consultation Mechanisms**: To improve parental support and engagement, schools could implement structured consultation mechanisms, such as regular workshops or online forums, where parents can provide input and receive information on RSHE content. Formalising this engagement would enhance transparency and may lead to greater community support for RSHE topics.

**Formalise Pupil Consultation Processes**: Schools should explore methods for systematic student feedback, such as end-of-unit surveys or focus groups, to foster greater buy-in and tailor the RSHE content more closely to pupils' needs and preferences. This approach would bridge the gap between teachers’ and pupils’ perceptions of engagement and give students a clearer sense of involvement in shaping their learning experience.

**Support for Specialised Schools and Tailored Resources:** To address the unique needs of non-mainstream schools, targeted resources and training should be made available to PRUs, APs, and special schools. These schools may require adapted resources and guidance to meet the specific requirements of their students.

**Promote Teacher Networking and Peer Support:** Establishing or enhancing RSHE networks would allow teachers to collaborate, share resources, and support each other in delivering the curriculum. Platforms such as online forums or in-person workshops can foster professional connections and provide avenues for teachers to seek advice on handling challenging topics.

**Integrate RSHE Across the Curriculum**: To alleviate time pressures, schools could embed RSHE topics within other curriculum areas, such as English, Science, or Social Studies, ensuring a more holistic approach to RSHE content. This strategy would allow students to receive continuous reinforcement of RSHE themes without overburdening timetabled lessons.

**Evaluate and Refine Implementation Strategies**: Schools could conduct regular assessments of RSHE implementation, involving feedback from all stakeholders—teachers, pupils, and parents. These evaluations would enable schools to identify areas of improvement and ensure that RSHE content aligns with the evolving needs of students.

**Moving Forward**

The report indicates that while schools have made significant strides in implementing RSHE, ongoing commitment to training, curriculum adaptation, and stakeholder engagement is essential for achieving its full potential. By embracing these recommendations, schools can strengthen RSHE delivery, creating a more inclusive, effective, and impactful curriculum that prepares young people for the complexities of modern relationships and health.