

Sex and relationships education: support for school governors

School governors have a statutory responsibility for sex and relationships education (SRE) in their school. This factsheet explains what SRE is and provides answers to the questions frequently asked by school governors.

What is SRE?

SRE aims to inform children and young people about relationships, emotions, sex, sexuality and sexual health. It enables them to develop personal and social skills and a positive attitude to sexual health and well-being.

SRE starts at home and is received from friends, television, films, magazines and school. It doesn't just happen when we're young: all through our lives we continue to learn about sex and relationships.

SRE in schools is best planned as part of Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE) and Citizenship and healthy school development. The context for PSHE and Citizenship is set by the aims of the revised National Curriculum (DfEE/QCA 1999) which requires schools to provide opportunities for all pupils to learn and achieve; promote pupils' spiritual, moral, social and cultural development; and prepare all pupils for the opportunities and responsibilities of life.

'It isn't just about sex, it's about relationships, and how people deal with each other.' Primary School Teacher

Does SRE have to be taught at our school?

Yes. All schools, including primary schools, are required to have an SRE policy (Education Act 1996) and are recommended to provide it as part of PSHE and Citizenship (SRE Guidance DfEE 0116/2000).

Do special schools have to provide SRE?

Yes. Special and mainstream schools have a duty to ensure that pupils with special educational needs are receiving SRE. The SRE Guidance states SRE should help all pupils understand their

SRE guidance and legislation

The 1996 Education Act consolidated all relevant previous legislation.

In summary:

- The SRE elements in the National Curriculum Science Order across all key stages are mandatory for all pupils of primary and secondary age.
- All schools must have an up to date policy that describes the content and organisation of SRE provided outside the National Curriculum Science Order. It is the school governors' responsibility to ensure that the policy is developed and made available to parents for inspection.
 - Primary schools should either have a policy statement that describes the SRE provided or give a statement of the decision not to provide SRE other than that provided within the National Curriculum Science Order.
 - Secondary schools are required to provide SRE which includes (as a minimum) information about sexually transmitted infections (STIs) and HIV/AIDS.

The SRE Guidance (DfEE 2000) is supported in legislation by the Learning and Skills Act (2000) which requires that:

- young people learn about the nature of marriage and its importance for family life and the bringing up of children
- young people are protected from teaching and materials which are inappropriate, having regard to the age and the religious and cultural background of the pupils concerned
- governing bodies have regard to the SRE Guidance.

The SRE Guidance (DfEE, 0116/2000) builds on these legal requirements and states that all schools must have an up to date SRE policy which:

- defines SRE
- describes how SRE is provided and who is responsible for providing it
- says how SRE is monitored and evaluated
- includes information about parents' right to withdrawal
- is reviewed regularly
- is available for inspection and to parents.

It also recommends that SRE is planned and delivered as part of PSHE and Citizenship. Schools are expected to have an overall policy on PSHE and Citizenship, which includes SRE. Governing bodies are expected to involve parents, children and young people, and health and other professionals to ensure that SRE addresses the needs of the community, education and health priorities, and the needs of children and young people.

physical and emotional development and enable them to make positive decisions in their lives. The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice (DfEE 2001) describes the governing body's responsibilities to 'ensure necessary provision is made for pupils who have special educational needs'. Children and young people with special needs are particularly vulnerable to abuse and SRE can help them to protect themselves now, as well as prepare them for adult life.

Does OfSTED look at SRE?

OfSTED is statutorily required under Section 10 of the School Inspections Act 1996 to evaluate and report on the spiritual, moral, social and cultural development of pupils at any school it inspects. This includes the school's SRE policy. OfSTED (2002) reports that good policies for SRE:

- state the aims and objectives and how the aims will be fulfilled
- are based on consultation with parents and the wider community
- establish the framework of values for SRE
- define the content of SRE and how the needs of individuals will be met, and link to child protection procedures
- give guidance on teaching methods
- spell out arrangements for pupils who are withdrawn from aspects of SRE
- specify the means of review and evaluation and the timetable for these processes.

The OfSTED report provides useful learning outcomes for SRE for all key stages. It challenges schools to be more thorough in their monitoring and evaluation. It recommends that a specialist team delivers SRE and that schools should actively seek pupils' views on SRE. It emphasises the importance of linking SRE with confidential health advice services in school and the wider community. It stresses the importance of planning and delivering SRE that meets the needs of all children and young people, especially those from black and minority ethnic communities, those with a disability, boys, school aged parents and gay young people.

How do we do SRE in a school with religious character?

All schools should ensure that SRE reflects their ethos. They also want children and young people to grow up feeling confident about their emotional and sexual health and with the ability to live alongside people who have different values and beliefs about sex and relationships. Consultation and partnership in planning SRE with pupils, parents and the wider community is key to success. Working together has proved constructive and reassuring to parents and teachers. Talking about the school's values and giving concrete examples of how questions are answered is helpful (Blake and Katrak, 2002).

How can SRE fit with all the different cultures represented in our school?

Again it is down to involving and consulting with the whole school community. Difficulties can be caused when assumptions are made. Talking and listening reduces misunderstanding. Many schools start with a fairly limited provision and SRE is further developed as confidence and trust is increased.

Is SRE part of Healthy Schools?

Yes. Each local authority in partnership with its Primary Care Trust (PCT) has developed a local healthy school programme, which supports schools with information and training on becoming a healthy school. SRE is one of a number of themes identified by the National Healthy School Standard (NHSS). The NHSS provides criteria and standards to ensure quality and expects schools to develop SRE through a whole school approach, as part of PSHE and Citizenship and in partnership with parents, pupils and community nurses.

How do I get involved with SRE?

Having interest and enthusiasm is a good starting point. A link governor is often selected to work with the school's PSHE and Citizenship Coordinator on policy and curriculum development for SRE. Many governors find the work enjoyable

and rewarding. Contact your local Healthy School Programme Coordinator for details of local and national training opportunities and information on the SRE and school governor training and video package from the Sex Education Forum (www.ncb.org.uk/sef) and National Association of Governors and Managers (www.nagm.org.uk).

How can we consult with parents?

'If you have worked in a genuine partnership with parents, you've consulted them about the policy, made resources open to them, then they are very reassured and actually relieved.'
Governor Advisor

Working in partnership has proven to be very effective in parent/teacher groups, parent/governor groups, parents' evenings or community-based meetings. Clear aims and a planned structure for sessions with parents makes the meeting feel safe. Although most parents want to talk to their children about sex and relationships, they often find it difficult and embarrassing and want schools to help them by providing good SRE. Surveys show 94 per cent of parents/carers support school based SRE (NER and HEA 1994). Only 0.04 per cent choose to withdraw their children from SRE (OfSTED 2002).

Can parents withdraw their children from SRE?

Parents do not have the right to withdraw their child from the SRE element of the National Science Curriculum. Reproduction is often taught within science. Further information on sex and relationships, skills development and values clarification are provided within PSHE and Citizenship. Parents do have the right to withdraw their child from SRE provided within PSHE and Citizenship. Your school needs to inform parents and carers about the procedures for requesting that their child is withdrawn, and these should be described in your policy. Involving the whole school community in the development of the SRE policy and programme ensures that withdrawal is rare.

What do we say to parents who want to withdraw their child?

The PSHE and Citizenship Coordinator and/or a senior manager should invite the parent to talk through any concerns and look at the materials used in and aims of SRE. This usually reassures, but if a parent does want to withdraw their child from SRE alternative arrangements will need to be made for the pupil. It may also be appropriate to offer further support to parents. *SRE: Support for school governors*, an information and training pack from the Sex Education Forum and National Association of Governors and Managers provides a leaflet for parents. Staff may look for support from the governing body in these potentially difficult situations.

If we consult with pupils what are they likely to tell us?

Children and young people tell us that their sex education is too little, too late and too biological and that the adults in their lives are too embarrassed or lack skills and knowledge. Children and young people want SRE where they can talk about feelings and relationships, have their questions answered in a straightforward way and explore 'real life' dilemmas.

Recent government legislation (Education Act 2002) requires schools to listen to children and young people and involve them in the process of running the school.

How can we make sure that pupils get confidential advice and support?

The classroom is a public place, where it is inappropriate to talk about private concerns, but SRE may raise issues where children need extra help and support. Many schools are working with PCTs, Connexions and voluntary advice agencies to establish a health advice service or 'one stop shop' either in school or nearby in the community. These services are popular with pupils and their families as well as teachers, especially in rural areas where access

to health services can be limited. Children and young people feel safe about taking a range of anxieties and worries to trained staff (Thistle, S 2003). Confidentiality is assured, and referrals can be made effectively. Child protection issues are also addressed within the locally agreed Child Protection Procedures.

SRE Guidance (DfEE 2000) recommends that schools provide pupils with 'precise details of local confidential advice services'. School can provide information through:

- notices on bulletin boards
- posters on class room walls
- leaflets
- information in student welfare booklets
- PSHE and Citizenship lessons
- visits from health professionals.

Your local Teenage Pregnancy Coordinator can provide a list of local services.

Can we get help from outside agencies?

People who can help to assess need, talk with parents, develop and plan policy and provision, and provide training and ongoing support include:

- local Healthy School Programme Coordinators
- local education authority PSHE and Citizenship advisors
- Teenage Pregnancy Coordinators
- local and national voluntary agencies
- local health professionals including community nurses.

Is it true that teenage pregnancy rates are high and sexual health is poor?

'To have the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Europe is not acceptable. To do nothing is not acceptable.' Secondary School Head Teacher

Teenage pregnancy rates are high, but they are decreasing now that we have a strong 10-year Teenage Pregnancy Strategy (SEU 1999). Ninety thousand girls and young women under 19 get pregnant every year, 7,000 of which are under 16. The rates of STIs amongst young people, including HIV, continues to rise.

International and national research shows that SRE improves sexual health

and well-being, reduces the teenage pregnancy rate, encourages young people to start having sex later, and reduces embarrassment, prejudice and discrimination – if it is provided by trained teachers and other adults who are informed, confident in using a range of learning activities and have an open and positive attitude to sexual health and well-being. SRE also needs to be linked to and coordinated with local sexual health services (HDA 2003).

Where do we start?

The following process is helpful in reviewing SRE policy:

- Include SRE as an agenda item in a Governors' meeting – ask the PSHE and Citizenship Coordinator to work with you to agree the review process.
- Agree a budget for SRE development and continued professional development of teachers.
- Set up a small SRE working group led by the PSHE and Citizenship Coordinator which includes the link Governor, a pupil, a teacher, a parent, a support staff member and a community nurse or health professional.
- Undertake an SRE audit. The local Healthy Schools Coordinator will support an audit, which identifies what SRE is currently delivered, what works well and what needs developing. This is done in consultation with the wider school community. Many schools are enjoying the results of effective pupil participation or active citizenship in this process. Pupils can develop questionnaires, conduct interviews with other pupils, parents and health professionals either in class groups, through school or class councils and peer education and support activities.
- The PSHE and Citizenship Coordinator, working with the SRE working group, collates audit information, revises and drafts SRE policy and submits it to the governing body for agreement on:
 - planning its dissemination
 - the method of evaluation
 - date of next review (SRE policy should be reviewed once every two to three years)
 - budget for resources, training and SRE development.

Model PSHE and Citizenship Policy Framework which integrates SRE

Introduction

- Name of school
- Date policy was completed
- People responsible
- Healthy school status

Information about

- The school
- The consultation process

The aims of PSHE and Citizenship

- Why it should be taught
- The topics and themes of PSHE and Citizenship include healthy eating and exercise, emotional health and well being, SRE, drug education, safety, citizenship
- How PSHE and Citizenship supports the ethos of the school
- How the whole school ethos supports PSHE and Citizenship
- How PSHE and Citizenship contributes to healthy school development

Organisation and planning

- Name of the PSHE and Citizenship Coordinator
- Who teaches PSHE and Citizenship
- How PSHE and Citizenship will meet the needs of all pupils, including those who are marginalised and vulnerable
- Where PSHE and Citizenship is taught (for example, in the curriculum, special events)
- Teaching methods and approaches
- Criteria for resource selection
- Staff professional development

How pupils' learning will be assessed, recorded and reported

How to link to, and make pupils aware of pastoral systems and health advisory services in school and the wider community

Specific issues

- Legal aspects relating to SRE, drug education, bullying, child protection and promoting racial equality
- Creating a safe environment for learning and teaching, confidentiality, boundaries
- Ensuring pupil participation and active citizenship, including peer education
- Ensuring partnerships across school with parents and wider community including agreements for using visitors in the classroom

Monitoring and evaluation

- Who will monitor the implementation of the policy
- How the work will be evaluated
- When will it next be reviewed, once every two to three years is advised

Appendices

- Guidance on particular issues relevant to SRE can be included in the appendix.

Useful contacts

National Healthy School Coordinators

Contact details are available from your LEA or Health Development Agency (telephone: 020 7661 3072, website: www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk).

Teenage Pregnancy Coordinators

Contact details are available from your local authority, PCT, and the Teenage Pregnancy Unit (telephone: 020 7972 5098, website: www.teenagepregnancyunit.gov.uk).

Sex Education Forum

Telephone: 020 7843 6052, website: www.ncb.org.uk/sef

References

- Blake, S and Katrak, Z (2002) *Faith and Values and Sex and Relationships Education*. NCB
- DfEE (2001) *The Special Educational Needs Code of Practice*
- DfEE (2000) *Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (0116/2000)*
- DfEE and QCA (1999 a) *The National Curriculum Handbook for primary teachers in England*
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- Health Development Agency (2003) *Teenage Pregnancy and Parenthood: A review of reviews*
- National Foundation for Educational Research and Health Education Authority (1994) *Parents, Schools and Sex Education*
- OfSTED (2002) *Sex and Relationships Education in Schools*
- Social Exclusion Unit (1999) *Teenage Pregnancy*
- Thistle, S (2003) *Secondary Schools and Sexual Health Services. Forging the links*. NCB

The Sex Education Forum and National Association of Governors and Managers, funded by the Department for Education and Skills and the Department of Health, have produced *SRE: Support for school governors*. This pack includes a 14-minute video and a range of training activities. More information on the pack or training is available from your local Healthy Schools Coordinator, NAGM or the Sex Education Forum.

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