

SEX AND RELATIONSHIP EDUCATION - SCHOOLS RESPONSIBILITIES

This factsheet clarifies for schools their responsibilities for addressing sex and sexuality within sex and relationship education (SRE) following the repeal of 'Section 28'. Although Section 28 did not apply to schools, it has caused confusion over what could be taught about sexuality. This factsheet reminds schools of what the Government's Sex and Relationship Education Guidance says about dealing with issues of sexuality and points to further guidance and sources of information.

KEY MESSAGES FOR SCHOOLS

No Change

The Learning and Skills Act 2000 amended the Education Act 1996 and places responsibility for determining sex and relationship education firmly with headteachers and governors. Repeal of Section 28 has not changed in any way, shape or form the framework for sex education in schools.

A School Policy

All schools should have an up-to-date policy for sex and relationship education which is developed in consultation with parents. The policy should reflect parents' wishes and the culture of the community the school serves and must:

- *define sex and relationship education;*
- *describe how sex and relationship education is provided and who is responsible for providing it;*
- *say how sex and relationship education is monitored and evaluated;*
- *include information about parents' right to withdraw; and*
- *be reviewed regularly.*

Schools should refer to the Sex and Relationship Education Guidance which was issued to all schools in July 2000 when developing their policy.

Materials

Headteachers and governors are responsible for ensuring that suitable materials are used in sex and relationship education. Inappropriate images should not be used nor should explicit material not directly related to explanation.

Pupil Needs

Schools should make sure that the needs of all pupils are met in their sex and relationship education programmes. Young people, whatever their developing sexuality, need to feel that sex and relationship education is relevant to them and sensitive to their needs.

Sexual Orientation

The Sex and Relationship Education Guidance makes clear that teachers should deal honestly and sensitively with sexual orientation, answer appropriate questions and offer support.

Sexual orientation and what is taught in schools is an area of concern for some parents. It is therefore important that schools liaise closely with parents so that they can reassure them of the content of programmes and the context in which they are presented.

Bullying

It is important that schools tackle all forms of abuse and bullying, including homophobic bullying.

Q. What should be taught about sex and relationships in schools?

The framework for Personal, Social and Health Education, and the Sex and Relationship Education Guidance issued to schools in July 2000 set out what should be taught.

The OfSTED report on sex and relationship education, published in April 2002, offers useful statements of learning outcomes for sex and relationship education for each key stage.

Q. Who is responsible for choosing the materials used in sex and relationship education; and how can we ensure that inappropriate materials are not used?

Headteachers and governors are responsible for making decisions about teaching and materials and they must have regard to the advice given in the Government's SRE Guidance.

Schools should ensure that teaching and materials are appropriate for the age and cultural background of pupils.

Schools should consult parents regularly on their sex and relationship policies and on sensitive materials. They should take on board any concerns raised about teaching and materials. There should be no reason for schools to use materials which a majority of parents consider unsuitable.

Q. What was Section 28?

Section 28 was the common name for Section 2A of the Local Government Act 1988. This section prohibited local authorities in England and Wales from 'promoting' homosexuality.

Q. Why didn't it apply to schools?

Because the Learning and Skills Act 2000 amended the Education Act 1996 and placed the responsibility for sex and relationship education firmly on teachers and governors. Section 28 was therefore legally obsolete with respect to teaching in schools.

Q. What role do local authorities have in sex education in schools?

Local authorities play an important, supportive role, for example in suggesting materials to aid teachers, but ultimate decisions about sex education rest with school governing bodies, having regard to the Government's Sex and Relationship Education Guidance and in consultation with parents.

Key documents and sources of advice

Sex and Relationship Education Guidance - Issued by DfEE in July 2000

www.dfes.gov.uk/sreguidance

SRE and Parents - leaflet for parents including information about their right to withdraw their child from SRE

www.dfes.gov.uk/sreandparents

Sex and Relationships Education - Support for School Governors - factsheet produced by the National Children's Bureau

www.ncb.org.uk/resources

OfSTED Report on Education about Sex and Relationships

www.ofsted.gov.uk/publications

DfES Anti-Bullying Pack - 'Don't Suffer in Silence'

www.dfes.gov.uk/bullying

Useful websites

www.teachernet.gov.uk/pshe

www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk

www.ncb.org/sef