

Offices & Reception



Bolton Muslim

success for all

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**Relationships,
Sex and Health
Education (RSHE)
Guidance
for Secondary Schools**

www.sreislamic.org

SRE ISLAMIC

DEAR HEADTEACHER AND MEMBERS OF THE GOVERNING BOARD

The protests outside the two Birmingham schools in 2019 were wholly avoidable. We all have a responsibility to ensure that these protests are not repeated elsewhere. They symbolise a breakdown of an important relationship – between schools and parents. Undoubtedly, parents want nothing more than to have good relationships with school staff and most schools want to reciprocate and create a strong bond between school and home.

We all recognise that when parents are involved in their children's education, children are better equipped to make progress and succeed. That is one of the reasons why parents are uniquely placed as one of the main stakeholders for schools. They have a vested interest in ensuring schools are successful, as this facilitates the best education for their children, the pupils in schools.

When protests happen, they are symptomatic of a breakdown in relationship between parents and

schools. In order to avoid conflict, we all have a collective duty to ensure that the seeds of conflict are not planted and watered.

The protests in Birmingham brought together a group of parents who felt their concerns were not being listened to. The message parents heard from the school is that the views of parents were unimportant and media outlets sought to fan the flames of conflict. Once started a resolution was impossible as the two sides took their position in the opposite corners of the boxing ring. When the dust settles and the media leave the fray, parents and school staff remain to pick up the pieces of a fractured relationship. It is in no one's interest for conflict to arise, let alone escalate.

All secondary schools have to teach RSHE from September 2020. In doing so all schools have to consult and engage parents in making key decisions on when and how the learning outcomes are taught, which resources are used

and in which year groups they should be covered. We recognise that you want to get it right and allay the concerns of parents. We want to help you to do that.

We recognise that the Department for Education (DfE) has created guidance to cover the way these subjects should be implemented. Yet the mixed messages from government often confuses the issue. This places school staff in an unenviable position. We have created this document to advocate on behalf of mainly Muslim parents. That does not mean these concerns are not shared across faith groups, as well as parents who do not hold to a faith. We do so to support your engagement with parents, so that we can work together to avoid conflict.

“Engagement is a positive step – it helps to ensure that everyone involved understands what is being taught, when and how. It helps develop a shared set of values between parents and schools on these subjects. It gives parents a voice and the knowledge that their views are being listened to. It helps to dispel myths about the subjects, and it creates an opportunity to build stronger relationships with parents.”

(Page 4, Parental Engagement on RSHE, DfE)

Engagement means schools providing

the opportunity for parents to feed in their views on the school’s proposed Relationships Education policy, and includes considering whether any strongly held views of their parent body should lead the school to adapt when and how they approach certain topics with their pupils.

(Page 5, Parental Engagement on Relationships Education, DfE)



Credit: The Bolton News

• All secondary schools have to teach ••••

WHAT ARE THE STATUTORY REQUIREMENTS?

- Parents have the right to request withdrawal from the sex education, but not the relationships education element. Every request should be approved apart from in exceptional situations.

“Schools must also ensure that their teaching and materials are appropriate having regard to the age and religious backgrounds of their pupils.”

(Page 24, Statutory Guidance)

- All secondary schools must have a Relationships and Sex Education policy. Parents must be consulted on its contents before it is finalised.

- Parents must be consulted on how and when you intend to teach these new statutory subjects.

How: Parents must be included when decisions on resources are made. The age and religious background of pupils must inform the choice of resources.

When: Parents must be included when deciding which year groups to cover the learning outcomes.

CONSULTATION

Consultation processes vary in their effectiveness. If you are seeking to engage parents in a collaborative process you must seek to ensure that you:

1. Are open and transparent: Set out clearly what consultation looks like in your school, what forms it takes and how parents can get involved. Include a timeline of when and how consultation will take place. Once a consultation process has been completed the consultation process and decision-making process must be published.

2. Adopt a varied approach to consultation: A parental survey can help to understand the views of parents in general, whilst focus groups can help to understand the views of parents in a more detailed way, especially around contentious matters.

However you structure your consultation

process you have to ensure that you are open to making changes and convey this to parents. Parents may express concerns about some of the resources you have bought in, the year group you propose to teach a particular topic area or your plans to invite an external organisation to deliver some aspects of RSHE. If you can show you are willing to re-think aspects of your implementation, this will re-assure parents that the consultation process is real and not a rubber stamping of pre-agreed decisions.

Although it goes without saying the final decision rests with the school and parents do not have an effective veto on content. Despite this, it's important to ensure that the views of parents are understood and parents are given confidence that the school is responsive to their views and concerns.

Questions to ask in a parent focus group

- What are your opinions on how we currently teach Sex and Relationships Education (SRE)?
- What do we do well and what can we do better?
- Is there anything missing from our implementation of the RSHE curriculum?
- Are there any aspects of the resources you feel are not appropriate to the targeted age groups?
- Are there any aspects of the resources you feel are not sensitive to the religious background of the pupils at our school?
- What are your thoughts on how we plan to deliver RSHE?
- Would you like any support in speaking to your children about RSHE topics, puberty and growing up?

* For consultations after September 2020 you can replace SRE with RSHE.

“Consultation is a process by which an organisation, over a specific period of time, seeks the opinions of relevant people about particular activities or

proposals, to better understand their views and take them into account when making final decisions. For schools, consultation is about them providing formal channels through which parents can express their views about certain aspects of the school’s work.”

(Page 2, Parental Engagement on Relationships Education, DfE)



ISLAMIC VIEW ON SEX AND RELATIONSHIPS

This section has been presented to guide faith sensitivities when teaching Relationships and Health Education or any discussion that takes place beyond these subjects. It is designed to support your understanding and engagement with Muslim parents in particular, and to start conversations to allay concerns Muslim parents may express.

Islamic Moral Viewpoint	Potential concerns from parents of a Muslim background	Possible Solutions
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Marriage: Any sexual relationship outside of marriage between a man and a woman is considered a major sin. This includes pre-marital and extra-marital sexual relationships.

Parents may be concerned that their children may be taught about sexual relationships far too early and against their moral perspectives.

Most parents will feel that this is something that should be taught by parents and the community rather than schools.

Clarify that Sex Education is not a statutory requirement and that RHE does not cover sexual relationships. If you decide to teach Sex Education parents should be provided with clear information on what is covered, how it is taught and in which year groups. This allows parents to make an informed decision about withdrawal.

It is easy to reassure them that the learning outcomes for Relationships Education will be delivered in a way that takes into account the age and religious background of pupils and as a result of a meaningful parental consultation process.

It is important to ensure that Relationships and Health Education and Sex Education are clearly separated. If you decide to teach non-statutory Sex Education, it is important to have separate policies covering both subjects.

Islamic Moral Viewpoint	Potential concerns from parents of a Muslim background	Possible Solutions
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Same-sex sexual relationships are also prohibited.

Parents may be concerned that LGBT relationships may be promoted. There are also concerns that lobby groups such as Stonewall may require the school to adopt policies or take part in initiatives that drown out the voices of parents.

It is important to clarify that where LGBT people are discussed, the discussion should not go beyond the fact that different people live in our society and should be treated with respect, as all people deserve.

There is a world of difference between talking about the existence of LGBT people and making judgements on whether certain relationships are morally acceptable or not.

Discussion must not veer into making value judgements about different lifestyles, such as 'it's okay to be Muslim and gay'. This would require schools to contradict deeply held theological positions..

Islamic Moral Viewpoint	Potential concerns from parents of a Muslim background	Possible Solutions
<p>God has created the male and female, as immutable characteristics. Changing one's created form is a sin and Islamically prohibited.</p>	<p>Parents may express concern that the school is confusing children about an immutable characteristic with deeply held moral consequences.</p>	<p>It is easy to reassure parents that transgender topics are not part of the RHE curriculum. If transgender people are talked about, it must not go beyond the fact that they exist and should be treated with respect, and must not veer into making value-based judgements on a morally contentious issue.</p>
<p>Images: It is impermissible to view naked images of people.</p>	<p>Parents may believe that children will be exposed to images that are inappropriate to their children's age and development.</p>	<p>It is important to allow parents to express their views about the appropriateness of the resources when you are running the consultation focus groups.</p> <p>It is easy to avoid using explicit images and replace them with diagrams and drawings when covering puberty.</p>

Additional Considerations

- It is also important to allow children and young people to learn sensitive topics in an environment in which they can be open, and this necessitates single sex classes for RSHE.

- The reasons why a parent's request for withdrawal is refused should be an exceptional one. The RSHE policy must transparently set out the reasons such as if the child is a looked after child (in care of the local authority).

“All schools should work closely with parents when planning and delivering these subjects.”

(Page 17, Statutory Guidance)

“Schools will retain freedom to determine an age-appropriate, developmental curriculum which meets the needs of young people, and is developed in consultation with parents and the local community.”

(Page 41, Statutory Guidance)



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