

# The sex and relationship education needs of young people: a review of research and school survey findings

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Frequent reference is made to evidence cited by the Sex Education Forum.

As always any mistakes rest with the authors.

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# 1. Executive Summary

## What is Sex and Relationships Education?

Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) is learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, relationships, human sexuality and sexual health. Some aspects are taught in science, and others as part of Personal, Social, Health and Economic PSHE education<sup>1</sup>. The 'Relationship' element in SRE is crucial because this contributes to maturity, empathy, wellbeing and self-confidence. When taught well by confident and trained practitioners, SRE is an enriching and memorable learning experience for children, preparing them with essential skills for life, such as building positive relationships, and enabling them to stay safe. Evidence demonstrates that happier young people have better health and education outcomes, giving them the best possible chance of achieving their potential. It also demonstrates the link between wellbeing and improvements in attendance and attainment rates.

## The context

Schools have a statutory duty to promote their pupils' wellbeing, and to prepare children for the responsibilities of adult life. In March 2017, the Department for Education announced that SRE is to be made statutory in all schools in England from the academic year 2019/2020. As well as playing a vital role in meeting schools' safeguarding obligations, Ofsted says that: 'SRE must start in primary school and be taught in an age-appropriate manner, starting with topics such as personal safety, bodily boundaries and friendships. Both primary and secondary school pupils, particularly girls, have said they need SRE to start earlier.'<sup>2</sup>

## Addressing this need: why Coram?

Coram is a leading children's charity that has been supporting vulnerable children across the UK for over 275 years, helping a million children and young people every year. Its Coram Life Education programme is the largest provider of health, wellbeing and drugs education, reaching 472,000 primary school children across the UK every year. Coram Life Education (CLE) has partnered with specialist education insurer Ecclesiastical to prepare children for, and educate them about, puberty and healthy relationships.

## Why did CLE undertake this research?

Schools must be in a position to deliver statutory SRE from September 2019. CLE, as the provider of PSHE education to nearly half a million children across the UK, wanted to understand how well

schools are prepared to meet their statutory obligations, and what their support needs are. With many schools already delivering some form of SRE to pupils, we undertook a survey and focus groups with school leaders to understand:

- Perceptions of SRE
- Current practice
- Perceived challenges and issues facing pupils

Our survey and focus groups were the first to be undertaken following the government's announcement, with 85 primary head teachers, PSHE co-ordinators and teachers welcoming additional CLE support to prepare for the legislation, and highlighting the issues and concerns schools have.

This report contains a review of the SRE context and research, our findings, and a summary of the Relationships Education programme themes and topics, to be tailored to meet the requirements of the legislation, and the needs of each school.

## What we found

- Two thirds of schools say they need more guidance on statutory SRE requirements
- Three quarters of schools say they need more advice on consulting parents about SRE
- More than a third of schools said they need additional support to teach SRE
- A third of schools need more help with identifying children's needs
- The big issues that schools tell us children are facing:
  - 83% friendship issues
  - 72% low self-esteem
  - 49% body image
  - 16% sharing inappropriate images or images without consent

## Next steps

Using insight from this research CLE is developing a new primary school Relationships Education programme to be rolled out from September 2017 to over 200,000 children through their national network of schools. Informed by CLE's educational expertise, and in line with the recommended content set out by the government, the SRE programme will consist of a comprehensive set of lesson plans, activities and teacher/parent guidance along the themes of relationships and emotional health, body ownership, puberty and reproduction.

<sup>1</sup> Sex and relationships education for the 21st century: Supplementary advice to the Sex and Relationship Education guidance DfE. PSHE Association, Brook and the Sex Education Forum, (2014).

<sup>2</sup> Ofsted, Not Yet Good Enough: PSHE in schools, (2013)

## 2. Introduction

### About Coram

Coram children's charity has been supporting vulnerable children across the UK for over 275 years, helping a million children and young people every year. Coram works to develop children and young people's skills and emotional health, finds adoptive parents, and champions children's rights.

The Coram Group is made up of a number of distinct entities, including Coram Life Education. The Group's mission and vision is to develop, deliver and promote best practice in the support of children and young people. Coram's vision is that all children will have the best possible chance to live a fulfilling life. We are developing as a National Centre of Excellence for Children, providing services for care experienced children, refugee, migrant and trafficked children, and those who have experienced trauma.

### Coram Life Education

Coram Life Education (CLE) is a charity and the leading provider of health, wellbeing and drugs education to nearly half a million children in 1 in 8 primary schools across the UK. Our programmes are delivered by trained educators in a specialist mobile classroom with 'Healthy Harold', a puppet giraffe mascot.

Evidence-based methods and approaches are designed to develop children's knowledge, skills and attitudes, stimulating curiosity and imagination, promoting positive social norms and delivering an enrichment experience throughout the primary school years. Delivery of high quality programmes has been enhanced by the 2016 launch of 'SCARF' (which stands for 'Safety, Caring, Achievement, Resilience, Friendship'), a comprehensive online framework of resources, lesson plans, assessment and planning tools for teachers to embed these essential foundations. SCARF has 12,000 school-based subscribers, supporting busy teachers to embed whole school approaches to improve children's wellbeing and academic progress.

CLE helps schools meet their statutory requirements for children's Spiritual, Moral, Social and Cultural (SMSC) development, and Ofsted inspection criteria for personal development, behaviour and welfare. CLE takes a three strand approach to addressing children's knowledge, skills and attitude, meeting

the Department for Education's recommended PSHE Association Learning Opportunities. Our programmes are aligned with the National Curriculum (Citizenship, Personal, Social, Health and Economic - PSHE education), covering all Key Stages. PSHE is defined<sup>3</sup> as a 'school subject through which pupils develop the knowledge, skills and attributes they need to manage their lives, now and in the future'.

This year, with the generous support of the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group, SCARF will be significantly enhanced by a Relationships Education programme, available for educator or teacher delivery and benefiting all primary school year groups from Years 1 to 6. The resources will help schools prepare for statutory Relationships and Sex Education from the academic year 2019/2020.

### What is Sex and Relationships Education?

Sex and Relationships Education (SRE) is learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, relationships, human sexuality and sexual health. Some aspects are taught in science, and others as part of PSHE education<sup>4</sup>. The 'Relationship' element in SRE is crucial because this contributes to maturity, empathy, wellbeing and self-confidence. When taught well by confident and trained practitioners, SRE is an enriching and memorable learning experience for children, preparing them with essential skills for life, such as building positive relationships, and enabling them to stay safe.

### Project overview and methodology

The Relationships Education project is made possible with a generous donation from the Ecclesiastical Insurance Group. Ecclesiastical is a specialist insurance and financial services company offering advice, expertise and protection that is owned by a charity. It specialises in education, charity, church and heritage insurance, alongside a range of other insurance and financial services products. Over 200,000 children will benefit from the new programme from September 2017, and many thousands of teachers who subscribe to SCARF will use the programme to prepare for statutory Relationships Education from 2019.

3 Source: PSHE Association. <https://www.pshe-association.org.uk/what-we-do/why-pshe-matters>

4 Sex and relationships education for the 21st century: Supplementary advice to the Sex and Relationship Education guidance DfE. PSHE Association, Brook and the Sex Education Forum, (2014)

CLE and Ecclesiastical are pleased to present their report of findings and research into what constitutes an effective and comprehensive Relationships Education programme, which will in turn inform the programme's themes, content and supporting guidance later this year.

Evidence demonstrates that happier young people have better health and education outcomes, giving them the best possible chance of achieving their potential. CLE and Ecclesiastical's partnership is based on a shared vision for young people's emotional wellbeing and resilience, and the Relationships Education programme will promote healthy relationships, puberty and reproduction, body ownership and staying safe, drawing on CLE's educational and curriculum expertise designed by and for teachers.

Aligned with the recommended approach set out by the Department for Education and Supplementary Guidance<sup>5</sup>, the new Relationships Education programme consists of a comprehensive set of lesson plans, activities, films, teacher and parent guidance. The programme has been informed by research to establish the needs of teachers in delivering the curriculum, and those of children and parents navigating feelings, friendship, relationships, being 'cyberwise' and staying safe from harm. The programme is currently being piloted and evaluated with schools. Following the pilot stage, the programme will be developed further for delivery to primary school year groups by trained educators and by school teachers, as part of the SCARF framework of resources.

The main elements of the project include:

- Research into the needs of young people including:
  - A review of the key research and documentation on SRE and the needs of young people;
  - An online survey of current practice and challenges drawing on the knowledge and expertise of primary school teachers and head teachers;
  - Focus groups with teachers with responsibility for delivering SRE in primary schools; and
  - An online survey of CLE's specialist PSHE educators drawing on their experience of delivering in 2,175 schools across the country
- The development of new teaching resources for CLE's Relationships Education programme, and the testing out of these new resources through piloting the programme in primary schools.
- The highlighting of key messages for both policy makers and schools concerning emotional wellbeing, relationships and body ownership via this report.
- The roll out of the new programme to benefit 200,000 school children a year from September 2017.

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<sup>5</sup> Sex and Relationships Education Guidance, Department for Education (2000), SRE for the 21st Century: SEF, Brook, PSHE Association (2014).

### 3. The changing SRE context: Where we are now

Schools have a statutory duty to promote their pupils' wellbeing, and to prepare children for the responsibilities of adult life. The government has reviewed the non-statutory status of PSHE (of which SRE is a part) in light of child sexual exploitation and inappropriate on-line content (e.g. 'sexting'), and has said that the curriculum should make provision for SRE within PSHE<sup>6</sup>. SRE and wellbeing are intertwined, and wellbeing improves attainment in schools<sup>7</sup>. Encouragingly, 88% of parents want SRE taught in all schools<sup>8</sup>.

As well as playing a vital role in meeting schools' safeguarding obligations, Ofsted says<sup>9</sup> that 'SRE must start in primary school and be taught in an age-appropriate manner, starting with topics such as personal safety, bodily boundaries and friendships. Both primary and secondary school pupils, particularly girls, have said they need SRE to start earlier.'

It is vital that SRE starts early as children are naturally curious about their bodies, where they came from, and growing up. They will often absorb information about sex and relationships even if no-one talks about it with them, and 1 in 4 girls start their periods before learning about it at school<sup>10</sup>. Children's questions need to be answered honestly in an age appropriate way in order to avoid confusion and shame, develop identity, respect, personal boundaries and feel able to seek help. As children are exposed to inaccurate, and sometimes sensationalist, information from peers and the media, the CLE Relationships Education programme will include myth-busting, challenging perceived norms relating to peers' risk-taking behaviour, such as promoting positive social norms and healthy relationships.

The CLE and Ecclesiastical partnership aims to make a significant impact on girls' and boys' emotional wellbeing. This is important because of the potential impact of SRE on wellbeing and its broader effects, including on mental health. It is sobering that over half of mental health problems in adult life start by the age of 14, and 75% by the age of 18<sup>11</sup>. School leaders and education wellbeing experts have called for early intervention,

and for wellbeing to be inspected by Ofsted. With specialist mental health services unable to support 1 in 4 children who have been referred by their GP or teachers<sup>12</sup>, this partnership is timely, with the potential to contribute to a positive impact on children and young people's emotional wellbeing.

#### **The status of SRE within PSHE**

In March 2017 the Department for Education announced that sex and relationships education (SRE) is to be renamed and made statutory in all schools in England from the academic year 2019/2020<sup>13</sup>. As part of the Children and Social Work Act<sup>14</sup>, Relationships and Sex Education will be taught in all secondary schools, and Relationships Education in all primary schools, with an emphasis on healthy relationships. At present, although SRE is not statutory, it is often taught within science, or as part of Personal, Social, Health and Economic (PSHE) education.

Age-appropriate lesson themes will include: healthy relationships, appropriate behaviour and consent; building awareness of online safety, sexting, pornography and sexual harassment. The approach the government is taking is an iterative one; setting out the main elements of SRE required but not being overly prescriptive on exactly what should be included and how. New guidance will provide more detail as the government consults with schools, teachers, parents and SRE providers later in 2017, about the best way to deliver this.

Elsewhere in the UK, SRE is part of the curriculum but not compulsory in Wales. The subject is not compulsory in Scotland but schools and local authorities are responsible for deciding how to implement SRE guidance. In Northern Ireland, the Department of Education requires each school to have policies on how it will address relationships and sexuality education.

6 National Curriculum in England, Department for Education, (2013).

7 Public Health England, (2014).

8 National Association of Head Teachers' survey, (2013).

9 Ofsted, Not Yet Good Enough: PSHE in schools, (2013) (finding that PSHE was inadequate in 40% of schools).

10 Sex Education Forum, (2015).

11 Future in Mind report DfE, NHS England (2015).

12 Education Policy Institute Time to Deliver report (2016).

13 Source: Department for Education: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/schools-to-teach-21st-century-relationships-and-sex-education>.

14 Available at [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk)

According to its 2013 report into PSHE education in schools, Ofsted found that SRE required improvement in over a third of schools. In primary schools this was because too much emphasis was placed on friendships and relationships, leaving pupils ill-prepared for physical and emotional changes during puberty, which many begin to experience before they reach secondary school. In secondary schools it was because too much emphasis was placed on 'the mechanics' of reproduction and too little on relationships, sexuality, the influence of pornography on students' understanding of healthy sexual relationships, and dealing with emotions and staying safe.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Ofsted, Not Yet Good Enough: PSHE in schools, 2013.



## 4 The benefits of PSHE and SRE across the life course

Prior to the government's announcement of statutory SRE, the evidence on the benefits of SRE had been gathering momentum for many years.

### Improved outcomes for young people

The fundamental rationale for providing SRE in all schools is that it reaches all children who go on to become adult citizens. The development of high quality, age and stage appropriate SRE can lead to equal and pleasurable relationships that are based on positive qualities such as mutual respect, commitment, care and trust. Effective SRE equips children and young people with a better understanding of their own needs and ability to empathise with others<sup>16</sup>. According to the Brook Young People charity, to be effective, SRE must be relevant and appropriate to the lives of children and young people, regardless of their family background or sexuality. The positive qualities of relationships, such as trust, respect and commitment, should be stressed, rather than the promotion of one form of relationship or sexual orientation.

Various studies have identified the benefit of SRE in keeping children and young people safe and healthy throughout their lives. Macdowall et al (2015)<sup>17</sup> found that young people (particularly young women) who had learned about sex and relationships mainly at school were less likely to report poor sexual health outcomes.

According to the All Party Parliamentary Group on Sexual & Reproductive Health in the UK 'SRE lays the foundation of knowledge and skills to equip young people to understand consent, and make positive and well informed choices about their sexual and reproductive health. Good SRE is associated with later sexual debut, condom and contraceptive use, a reduced risk of pregnancy before 18 and [non-consensual] sex'<sup>18</sup>.

The international evidence-base for the UK government's ten-year strategy on teenage pregnancy – leading to the lowest teenage conception rates on record today - highlighted

that the strongest evidence of impact on teenage pregnancy rates are: (i) comprehensive information advice and support – from parents, schools and other professionals; and (ii) accessible, young people-friendly sexual and reproductive health services<sup>19</sup>.

### A question of children's rights and their consent

In 2015, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) undertook an international review of sexuality education and curriculums, promoting the development of key competencies, and examining how gender norms, religion and culture influence learners' attitudes and behaviour. It found that too often, topics are taught too late, for example, after young people have already experienced puberty or menstruation or initiated sexual activity<sup>19</sup>.

Children's rights to education, information, and health services are enshrined by the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child<sup>20</sup>. Understanding risk, consent, boundaries, appropriate behaviour, and responsibility (including the criminal age of responsibility from 10 years) are therefore essential aspects of effective SRE, particularly in the context of normalised sexual imagery of children, and high profile inquiries into child sexual exploitation. The House of Commons Education Select Committee into SRE<sup>21</sup> received evidence that young people's understanding of issues relating to consent and healthy relationships was insufficient.

The 2014 Inquiry into child sexual exploitation in Rotherham<sup>22</sup> cited schools reporting that children aged as young as 11 (often already victims of neglect and child abuse) were being groomed by large numbers of older men, and the 'ease with which young children aged from about 8-10 years can be targeted and exploited in this way without their families being aware of the dangers associated with internet use'. The report recommended that 'Relationships and sex education must be provided by trained practitioners in every educational setting for all children. This must be part of a holistic/

16 Health Behaviour of School Aged Children 2015, University of Hertfordshire p99.

17 Associations between source of information about sex and sexual health outcomes in Britain: findings from the third National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal-3) (British Medical Journal, 2015) <http://bmjopen.bmj.com/content/5/3/e007837.full>.

18 APPG Sexual & Reproductive Health 'Breaking Down the Barriers' Report (2015).

19 Teenage Pregnancy Strategy: Beyond 2010 DCSF/DoH (2010)

19 UNESCO Comprehensive Sexuality Education: A Global View (2015).

20 UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), [https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC\\_united\\_nations\\_convention\\_on\\_the\\_rights\\_of\\_the\\_child.pdf?\\_ga=2.85156445.558130221.1499270904-815965940.1476365159](https://downloads.unicef.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2010/05/UNCRC_united_nations_convention_on_the_rights_of_the_child.pdf?_ga=2.85156445.558130221.1499270904-815965940.1476365159)

21 House of Commons (2015). Education Select Committee- Fifth Report: Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/145/14502.htm>

22 Independent Inquiry into Child Sexual Abuse in Rotherham 1997-2013, Dame Alexis Jay OBE (2014) section 5.17, 5.19 recommendation 51.

whole-school approach to child protection that includes internet safety and all forms of bullying and harassment and the getting and giving of consent'. Similarly the Bailey Review<sup>23</sup> called for a clampdown on the sexualised 'wallpaper' surrounding children and young people.

### **Addressing 21st century issues: 'Sexting' and cyberbullying**

Sexting has been defined as "when people send sexual messages – sometimes together with photos or videos (also known as nude or semi-nude selfies) – by text, an app or online."<sup>24</sup> Sexting is also referred to as 'youth produced sexual imagery'<sup>25</sup>.

In its evidence to the House of Commons Education Select Committee, the NSPCC explained that 'SRE can encourage children and young people not to engage in potentially harmful behaviour such as sexting, and enable them to recognise what is abusive behaviour and how to get help'<sup>21</sup>.

### **PSHE and attainment**

One of the questions raised about SRE, often taught within PSHE education, in terms of its impact on sexual attitudes and behaviours, attainment and well-being, is how far and how well it 'works'. A statistical-analysis of 75 recent studies<sup>26</sup> found that such interventions led to increases in social skills and overall beneficial effects on seven key outcomes including: academic achievement, substance abuse, social skills, positive self-image, anti-social behavior, mental health, and pro-social behavior. Research also demonstrates the link between wellbeing and improvements in attendance and attainment rates, particularly for those eligible for free school meals and pupils who had been performing at below the national average in Maths and English<sup>27</sup>.

PSHE interventions such as those offered by CLE are crucial in delivering improvements in these areas, thus contributing to children's progress, improving attainment as well as other positive benefits. A 2015 impact study to investigate the longer term impact of CLE's education sessions on school children indicated that exposure to CLE

may have helped develop protective characteristics against social exclusion and bullying at school.

This is significant because the DfE evidence to the House of Commons Education Committee<sup>28</sup> (2015) stated that "children with higher levels of emotional, behavioural, social and school well-being on average have higher levels of academic achievement".

Public Health England have also identified some of the cost benefits of PSHE and SRE, highlighting that interventions to tackle emotional learning are cost saving in the first year through reductions in social service, NHS and criminal justice system costs and have recouped £50 for every £1 spent. Drug and alcohol interventions can also help young people engage in education, employment and training, bringing a total lifetime benefit of up to £159 million<sup>30</sup>.

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21 House of Commons (2015). Education Select Committee- Fifth Report: Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/145/14502.htm>

23 Department for Education (2011 updated online), Bailey Review of the Commercialisation and Sexualisation of Childhood.

24 As defined by the NHS. <http://www.nhs.uk/Livewell/Sexandyoungpeople/Pages/sexting-images-risk-young-people.aspx>

25 Sexting in schools and colleges: Responding to incidents and safeguarding young people (2017) UK Council for Child Internet Safety

26 DfE (2015) PSHE Education: A review of impact and effective practice

27 See for example, Challen, A., Noden, P. West, A., and Machin, S. (2011). UK Resilience Programme Evaluation: Final Report. Research Report DfE-RR097.

28 House of Commons (2015). Education Select Committee- Fifth Report: Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/145/14502.htm>

30 House of Commons (2015). Education Select Committee- Fifth Report: Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools <https://www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201415/cmselect/cmeduc/145/14502.htm>

## 5. The SRE needs of young people

### Young people's SRE needs according to teaching professionals

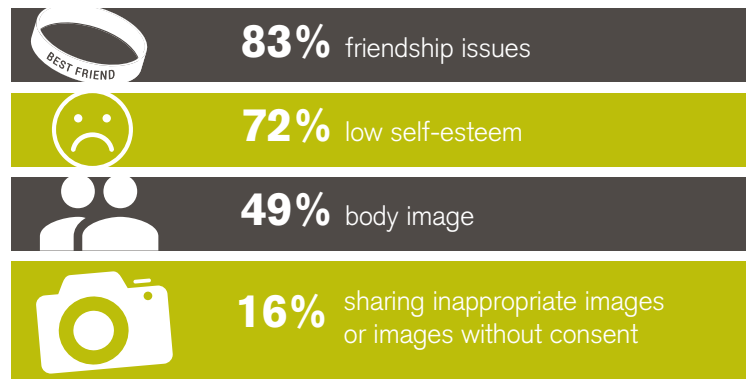
Following the government's announcement of statutory SRE, CLE, in partnership with

Ecclesiastical, carried out the first national survey of 85 school leaders, and 3 school-based focus groups to find out how prepared they are for the changes. Here are our findings.

**More** than a third of schools said they needed additional support to teach SRE



The **big issues** that schools are facing:



In **71%**

of schools, it is teachers who educate pupils about puberty and reproduction. In others, it is delivered by the school nurse (**19%**) or an external agency (**6%**)



In the vast **majority of schools**, all Sex and Relationships Education is delivered by teachers



\*From Coram Life Education Sex and Relationships Education School Survey carried out between March to May 2017 with 85 headteachers, PSHE co-ordinators and teachers responsible for SRE.

Only

**1%**

of schools currently teach pupils in **Y1** and **Y2** (aged 5 to 7) self-esteem, body image and feelings



**1 in 3**

schools need more help with identifying children's needs in relation to SRE



**63%**

of schools teach **Y5** and **Y6** pupils (aged 9 to 11) about puberty, but only **19%** teach them about self-esteem, body image and feelings, and only **16%** teach them about staying safe and consent



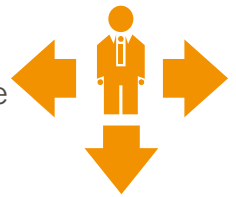
**Three quarters**

of schools say they need more advice on consulting parents about SRE



**Two thirds**

of schools say they need more guidance on statutory SRE requirements



\*From Coram Life Education Sex and Relationships Education School Survey carried out between March to May 2017 with 85 headteachers, PSHE co-ordinators and teachers responsible for SRE.

### **Young people's SRE needs according to policy makers and providers**

SRE Supplementary Guidance<sup>32</sup> identifies why children, young people and parents think SRE is important, suggesting that – at the appropriate age and stage of development – children and young people:

- Want to learn about issues such as body confidence, love and sexual attraction, how to respond to peer pressure, and how to behave in a relationship;
- Have a right to feel safe and healthy, and a right to education that helps them learn and achieve;
- Want parents and carers to talk to them about growing up and sex, and to learn about other people's views and opinions in school; and
- Need help to understand the way their bodies and feelings change as they grow and develop, and to develop skills and confidence.

Children are naturally curious about growing up, their bodies and reproduction. Their questions need to be answered honestly, using language and explanations appropriate for their age and maturity and avoiding unnecessary mystery, confusion, embarrassment and shame.

SRE needs to be inclusive. Some young people in specific groups may feel excluded in SRE sessions. These may include:

- Lesbian Gay Bisexual and Transgender students (who make up around 10% of any school population) who often report that SRE is solely about heterosexual relationships;
- Students with physical or learning disabilities; and
- Boys, who may feel excluded as they see SRE as aimed more at girls and they are often anxious about being 'shown up' as ignorant about sexual matters.

### **Young people's SRE needs according to the government**

The government highlighted in its announcement on statutory SRE the importance of ensuring subjects are carefully designed to safeguard and support pupils whilst also being deliverable for schools. It set out an indicative list of content (presented and discussed later), and also identified four broad pillars of further review work including:

- healthy bodies and lifestyles, including keeping safe, puberty, drugs and alcohol education;
- healthy minds, including emotional wellbeing, resilience, mental health;
- economic wellbeing and financial capability;
- careers education, preparation for the workplace and making a positive contribution to society.

The government also highlighted some further key principles. Although parents will not be able to withdraw their children from Relationships Education in primary schools, or Relationships and Sex Education lessons in secondary schools, they will be able to withdraw their child from sex education lessons to enable parents to teach this themselves, in a way which is consistent with their own values.

In addition, the government has highlighted its commitment to ensuring that the SRE education being provided is appropriate to the age of the pupils and their religious background. This will enable faith schools to teach these subjects according to the tenets of their faith, whilst still being consistent with requirements of the Equality Act<sup>33</sup>. The Church of England and the Catholic Education Service have expressed their support for the new legislation<sup>34</sup>.

<sup>32</sup> Sex & Relationships Education for the 21st Century: SEF, Brook, PSHE Association 2014

<sup>33</sup> DfE (2017), Policy Statement: Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education, and Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education. p.4.

<sup>34</sup> Sex Education Forum FAQs 2017

Consultation by the DfE will include consideration of subject content, school practice and quality of delivery. In relation to the quality of delivery and its implementation, the work will consider:

- building the knowledge and skills of teachers and leaders (and what support schools may require for this);
- understanding and disseminating evidence-based good practice;
- developing high-quality resources;
- creating the right level of focus to raise status; and
- whether it will be useful to change the name of PSHE via guidance.

### **SRE needs according to young people**

Young people themselves suggest a link between PSHE and the way they think about health issues: 74% of respondents to the latest Health Behaviour in School-Aged Children survey<sup>35</sup> felt that PSHE classes helped them to look after their own health and improved their skills and abilities to consider the importance of their own health.

Evidence from the National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles (Natsal) shows that the percentage of young people citing school as their main source of information about sexual matters has increased from 27% in 1990-91 to 39% in 2010-12. Despite this increase, just over half of men and just under half of women still report a non-authoritative source as their main provider (i.e. neither school, parent, nor health professional).<sup>36</sup>

According to the HBSC survey, young people reported a decrease in satisfaction with PSHE and sexual health lessons as students get older. This may indicate that the topics covered do not adapt according to the changing needs of young people over time, and that specific topics on the curriculum for older young people are needed. One example of this could be the popularity amongst young people of health messages conveyed by vloggers on YouTube<sup>37</sup> - delivering what young people want in a manner that engages them. Vloggers are

enthusiastic about the subject, and they discuss topical themes of relevance and interest to young people.

Young people have also reported that in primary schools there is too much emphasis placed on friendships and relationships, leaving pupils ill-prepared for physical and emotional changes during puberty, which many begin to experience before they reach secondary school<sup>38</sup>.

In research undertaken for Brook<sup>39</sup>, young people gave their views on their experiences of SRE. Nearly half of secondary school pupils said that SRE didn't cover what they really needed to know about sex. One in four said they didn't get any SRE in school at all. Of those that did, a quarter said their SRE teacher wasn't able to teach it well.

The research undertaken by Brook drew on young people's experience of SRE, which included the following:

**Teaching without embarrassment** – 86% wanted an SRE teacher who was not embarrassed to answer any question asked by a pupil in the lesson. This is because 79% said SRE lessons were a chance to ask questions they couldn't ask at home;

**In everyday language** – 83% wanted SRE teachers to talk using everyday language they understand;

**Input into SRE lessons** – 82% wanted schools to listen to what they wanted when deciding what is covered in SRE;

**Training for teachers** – 76% thought the teacher taking SRE should be specifically trained; and

**Delivered in smaller groups** – 55% wanted SRE taught in small groups rather than a whole class together, although only 33% thought boys and girls should be taught SRE separately.

35 HBSC, University of Hertfordshire 2015

36 Evidence from the House of Commons Education Select Committee: Fifth Report Life lessons: PSHE and SRE in schools.

37 "The facts of life for the YouTube generation", in The Times Education Supplement, 13 January 2017.

38 Ofsted, Not Yet Good Enough: PSHE in schools, 2013.

39 Brook (2011), Sex and Relationships Education fit for the 21st century: We need it now.

## 6. Effective SRE delivery

### **SRE must be a joint effort by both school and parents/carers**

Feedback from children and young people shows that they value being able to draw on different sources of information and education and this includes being able to talk to their parents and carers about sex and relationships. Whilst some parents and carers may feel that they lack the skills, confidence and knowledge to talk to their children, and look to schools for support, schools and parents need to work together to make sure children and young people get the information and support they need. CLE's Relationships Education programme includes teacher guidance and sources of further support for young people, parents and schools.

### **Specially trained educators should deliver the SRE curriculum**

Young people, along with leading education providers and the DfE have said SRE is best when teachers are confident, unembarrassed, able to teach correct biological facts and also explore relationships issues<sup>40</sup>. The House of Commons Education Select Committee heard that only 3 per cent of teachers felt that initial teacher training had prepared them adequately to teach SRE. The National Association of Head Teachers highlight that 'Often you'll find teachers lacking in confidence about how to [teach SRE] or simply not feeling they understand how to teach it effectively. And then sometimes the pupils or students seize on the fact the teacher appears not to be at ease or confident, and then the class can lose its integrity'<sup>41</sup>.

The Women and Equalities Committee Inquiry (2016) into sexual harassment and violence in schools recorded teaching unions' support for more and better training for teachers to deliver SRE, and more broadly the issue of sexual harassment and sexual violence through initial teacher training routes and continuing professional development.<sup>42</sup>

### **SRE information and education must be correct and accurate**

Linked to the training of SRE delivery staff is the need to ensure that the content being delivered is medically and factually accurate. SRE has a critical role in challenging and correcting myths as well as keeping children and young people safe, so it must

be based on medically correct information about contraception, reproduction and sexual health. A range of views on sex and relationships should be discussed, including faith perspectives, but teachers must be clear when they are presenting facts and when they are presenting opinions or beliefs.

### **The comprehensive range of topics required by young people must be included**

Young people's needs on SRE are broad ranging and in its announcement of statutory SRE<sup>43</sup>, the government emphasised the importance of ensuring subjects are carefully designed to safeguard and support pupils whilst also being deliverable for schools. Pending a public consultation, the broad focus will include:

- different types of relationships, including friendships, family relationships, dealing with strangers and, at secondary school, intimate relationships;
- how to recognise, understand and build healthy relationships, including respect for self and others, commitment, tolerance, boundaries and consent, and how to manage conflict, and also how to recognise unhealthy relationships;
- how relationships may affect health and wellbeing, including mental health;
- healthy relationships and safety online; and
- factual knowledge, at secondary school, around sex, sexual health and sexuality, set firmly within the context of relationships.

### **SRE must take account of young people's lives and context**

One of the key messages from research on SRE is that young people require a more holistic curriculum that goes beyond the biological elements of sex. It needs to also cover relationships and wider issues that young people face and want information about. Furthermore, account must be taken of the 'psychosocial' factors which affect behaviour, including values, norms and self-efficacy.

Young people's views on, and behaviours relating to, sex and relationships are part of the wider

40 Sex & Relationships Education for the 21st Century: SEF, Brook, PSHE Association 2014

41 NAHT Leadership Focus September 2016.

42 Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry 2016 Recommendation 29.

43 DfE Public announcement on statutory RSE and PSHE March 2017.

44 Brook (2011), Sex and Relationships Education fit for the 21st century: We need it now.

context of their lives. Signposting young people to wider services such as health services, LGBTQ youth groups, sexual assault and domestic violence services, should be a key element of any SRE offer.

### **SRE must promote core values**

As schools develop core values that define the culture across the school, SRE should promote clear core values, including mutual respect, loving and happy relationships, rights to information, safety and health, being inclusive of difference (including gender, identity, sexual orientation, disability, age, faith, culture) and responsibility for oneself and others. Good quality SRE can provide a safe space for children and young people to identify and reflect on their own values and those of others, including their peers.

### **Delivery of SRE must be timely and age appropriate**

One of the common criticisms from young people who have had experience of SRE is that by the time they receive the information and education they need, it is often too late. Evidence shows that SRE works best if it starts before a young person has their first experience of sex and if it responds to the needs of young people as they mature. SRE must start in primary school and be taught in an age-appropriate manner, starting with topics such as personal safety and friendships. Both primary and secondary school pupils, particularly girls, have said they need SRE to start earlier<sup>44</sup>. According to the Women and Equalities Committee: 'By the time they reach secondary school, children often have entrenched views about gender norms. It is, therefore, important that children are educated about gender equality, consent, relationships and sex in an age appropriate way starting in primary school'<sup>45</sup>.

### **Participatory and appropriate learning methods are used**

Evidence shows that SRE is more effective if it develops children and young people's skills as well as knowledge. Participatory and interactive learning tasks need to be built into SRE so that skills such as communication, negotiation and listening can be practiced and developed.

Research by Brook suggests that young people want quality teaching to include the methods they prefer: in-class videos; open or anonymous Q&A sessions; and external speakers. Children and young people often say that external visitors enrich their learning because visits are memorable. However, visitors must be carefully selected, so as to ensure their values are in line with the school's ethos and values, that they are using facts and evidence to inform their teaching, and that they work within the school's values framework and confidentiality/safeguarding policy. Making sure that children feel comfortable in SRE classes is also important, and this may be enhanced via small group work.

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<sup>44</sup> Ofsted (2010) Personal, social, health and economic education in schools. London: Ofsted.

<sup>45</sup> Women and Equalities Select Committee Inquiry 2016 Recommendation 24.



## 7. CLE's Relationships Education Programme

The school's commitment to promoting the personal and social development, health and wellbeing of its pupils should be evident in its statement of aims and values. This underpins the ethos of the school, and should be reflected in its policies and in the breadth of the curriculum – including the teaching of PSHE and SRE.

CLE's Relationships Education programme is a comprehensive resource which will be available for schools who subscribe to CLE's SCARF online framework. It brings together all the key elements of SRE: Relationships, Body Ownership, Emotional Health, Puberty and Reproduction. Aligned to the National Curriculum, PSHE Association's Programme of Study and related Learning Outcomes, the programme reflects the needs and requirements identified in CLE's school survey and, crucially, by young people themselves, through feedback captured by the Sex Education Forum.

In its evidence to the Education and Health Select Committees on the role of education in children and young people's mental health<sup>46</sup>, CLE emphasised the strategies used to promote positive social norms which make a tangible difference to young people's behaviours: the more we can promote positive and healthy behaviours the more those behaviours increase within the group. Focusing on extreme (negative/risk-taking) behaviour can contribute to misperception problems, and by contrast, talking regularly and credibly about the fact that the majority exhibit healthy and positive behaviours means children are more inclined to adopt those behaviours. CLE's balanced Relationships Education programme will promote healthy norms challenging misperceptions of peers' risk taking, and taking a preventative approach.

CLE's Relationships Education programme consists of:

### **1. A comprehensive set of age-appropriate lesson plans (and related activity materials) covering all aspects of a balanced, Relationships Education programme.**

The lessons identify the key skills, attitudes and values children need to develop healthy relationships with their peers, the information they need to keep themselves safe, and how to ask for help when they need it.

Year 1 lessons explore themes around children recognising the difference between surprises and secrets, when not to keep adult secrets, being able to name the main parts of the body, including agreed names for sexual parts so as to keep them safe from harm, to judge acceptable and unacceptable physical contact, and how to respond (including who to tell and how to tell them)

Year 2 lessons build on Year 1 themes and in addition look at the process of growing from young to old, how people's needs change, and the new opportunities and responsibilities that increasing independence may bring, including keeping themselves and others safe.

Year 3 lessons build on themes in Key Stage 1 and introduces themes about change, including bereavement, healthy and unhealthy relationships (friendships), how images in the media do not always reflect reality and the impact on people's thoughts and feelings, the nature and consequences of discrimination, the importance of protecting personal information online, understanding risk and building resilience, making informed choices, resisting pressure, and recognising when and how to ask for help.

Year 4 builds on the themes covered in Key Stage 1 and Year 3 and looks more closely at body changes as children approach and move through puberty. These include menstruation and human reproduction, conflicting emotions, what positively and negatively affects physical, mental and emotional health, understanding good and not so good feelings, recognising and challenging stereotypes, the consequences of their actions, pressure to behave in an unacceptable, unhealthy or risky way, and that marriage is a commitment freely entered into by both people.

Year 5 builds on the themes in Key Stage 1 and Lower Key Stage 2 in more depth, looking more closely at body changes and feelings during puberty, how children's changing feelings can affect those they live with, what makes relationships unhealthy, exploring risky behaviour in more detail, different types of bullying, how to keep personal information private online, and how to use social media safely.

Year 6 builds on all the themes of the previous 5 years of the curriculum, with some new content built into the lesson plans looking at body image, forced marriage,

46 House of Commons Education and Health Committees (2017): Children and young people's mental health: the role of education

human reproduction, communities at risk of Female Genital Mutilation, national, regional, religious and ethnic identities, and transgender issues.

The programme consists of a range of interactive, easy to use teaching strategies and resources, using relevant sorting cards, engaging scenarios, true or false statements, storytelling, story boards, realistic body parts illustrations, timelines and drama techniques. It signposts to useful resources and educational films created by other highly respected education and prevention charities such as the NSPCC and the Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre (CEOP).

## **2. Three new educator-led workshops – one each for Years 4, 5 and 6.**

These workshops will be offered and delivered by CLE's local educators. The content of these is flexible, designed to meet schools' varying needs, as identified in our survey and research findings. The themes and topics will cover puberty and reproduction, body ownership - including body image – and relationships, including assertiveness and developing safe behaviours in relationships.

## **3. Teacher guidance films**

CLE's research reinforces that teachers want support and guidance to implement safe and effective SRE programmes. The SCARF section of the CLE website includes a series of 22 short training film clips that teachers can access to support their delivery of Relationships Education. These films model good practice, offer teaching and learning strategies and how to create a safe learning environment.

## **4. Teachers' guidance booklet**

Also available through the [coramlifeeducation.org.uk](http://coramlifeeducation.org.uk) website is an interactive booklet providing teachers with supporting guidance (e.g. relationship education and values, answering difficult questions, approaches to social norms education, confidentiality and working with parents). The guidance signposts teachers to further resources to advance their knowledge and understanding of effective Sex and Relationships Education.

## **7. Key reflections of findings**

The findings of CLE's research and surveys highlights that:

- the design and the delivery of the SRE curriculum should draw on evidence of effective practice and be co-designed with young people so that it meets their needs and ensures a great teaching and learning experience;
- SRE should be included in teacher training, so that teachers develop competencies, confidence and skills, considered vital by Ofsted, teaching professionals and by young people;
- effective SRE is developed and delivered in an age appropriate way that takes account of the maturity and understanding of pupils, recognising that primary aged children need a balanced content that includes friendships/relationships, reproduction and puberty, and staying safe;
- alongside PSHE education engaging pupils across the curriculum, SRE should be timetabled alongside other subjects and not be confined to a 'one off' session or assembly; and
- resources for teachers should not be too prescriptive but enable them to meet statutory requirements, work effectively with children and with parents, and deliver a structured, engaging learning experience.

These findings have informed the development of the new CLE Relationships Education programme and resources, available from September 2017.

For further information please go to [coramlifeeducation.org.uk/SCARF](http://coramlifeeducation.org.uk/SCARF).

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