

Cyflwynwyd yr ymateb hwn i ymchwiliad y [Pwyllgor Plant, Pobl Ifanc ac Addysg i weithredu diwygiadau addysg](#)

This response was submitted to the [Children, Young People and Education Committee inquiry into Implementation of education reforms](#)

IER 19

Ymateb gan: NSPCC Cymru

Response from: NSPCC Cymru

Nodwch eich barn mewn perthynas â chylch gorchwyl yr ymchwiliad. | Record your views against the inquiry's terms of reference.

NSPCC Cymru is pleased to have the opportunity to respond to the Implementation of Education Reforms, and our response will focus on the implementation of RSE in schools, and professional learning, as these are most relevant to NSPCC's work in Wales.

Implementation of the Curriculum for Wales in early years settings, primary schools and secondary schools.

NSPCC Cymru has welcomed the introduction of mandatory RSE for all children and young people aged 3-16 as part of the new Curriculum for Wales. We believe that high-quality inclusive RSE has a vital preventative role to play to safeguard children. Age and developmentally appropriate RSE is vital for helping children recognise healthy and unhealthy behaviour, reflect on their own experiences and attitudes, and contribute to a positive school culture. NSPCC sees educative programmes as an opportunity to make sure that all young people know that they have a right to be treated, and responsibility to treat others, with dignity and respect.

We do however have concerns about the implementation of RSE in Wales. We have been calling for better training and support for teachers and schools, as well as making sure children's voices and experience are central to the development of RSE. As explored in more detail below, NSPCC Cymru wants to see a funded national programme of professional learning on RSE for all school staff, as well as a dedicated and specialist trained RSE lead practitioner for all primary and secondary schools and a RSE advisor at local authority level. **We would like the inquiry to explore what training and support teachers have received and where the gaps are. For implementation to be most effective, we suggest that Welsh Government convenes a RSE implementation group, made up of cross sector stakeholders to help monitor and support the development of RSE within the new curriculum.**



RSE needs to be informed by the voices of young people

One of the problems around the implementation of RSE is ensuring its relevance for young people and that it is informed by their voices and experiences. Research suggests that there is a significant gap between young people's lived experiences and the relationship and sexuality education that they receive¹, with many being dissatisfied with the quality, inclusivity and relevance of the RSE that is being provided². New research commissioned by the NSPCC highlights that young people are rarely listened to and consulted on what and how they want to learn about sexuality and relationships, and why change is needed³. These findings show that young people want the RSE curriculum to be more comprehensive and more closely connected to their own lives and the real-world experiences of others, and they want to active participants in building a creative learning environment with each other and their RSE providers.

In Wales, where mandatory RSE is being rolled out to all children and young people, there is a real opportunity and a need to make sure young people are consulted on what they want from RSE, ensuring it stays relevant to the diversity and complexity of their lives and can adapt to their changing experiences and needs. NSPCC Cymru would like to see a commitment from Welsh Government to frequently review the RSE Code, RSE guidance and relevant linked action plans to ensure they remain relevant, and that the content is inclusive, sensitive and adapts to the views and needs of young people. Importantly, these reviews must be carried out in collaboration with young people and experts by experience, so they can be actively involved in decision making and planning in relation to RSE. This must be done in a trauma informed way, which does not cause further harm and is accessible and inclusive of all needs. **We ask that the inquiry seeks clarification from Welsh Government on their plans to regularly review the RSE curriculum and how they are going to embed the voices of children and young people in RSE to achieve a curriculum that remains relevant.**

A need for whole school approach guidance

NSPCC Cymru has also welcomed the RSE Code⁴, which sets out the mandatory themes and matters that must be covered within the RSE curriculum. It has been developed to support schools to design their RSE. While this is a useful framework to guide schools on the content

¹ Hollis, V. et al (2022) [Children and young people's views on learning about relationships, sex, and sexuality: a narrative review of UK literature](#). London: NSPCC; Renold, E. et al (2023) [“We have to educate ourselves”: how young people are learning about relationships, sex and sexuality](#). London: NSPCC

² See Hollis, V. et al (2022) [Children and young people's views on learning about relationships, sex, and sexuality: a narrative review of UK literature](#). London: NSPCC;; Sex Education Forum (2022) [Relationships and Sex Education: The Evidence](#); Renold, E. and McGeeney (2017) [The Future of the Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales](#). Welsh Government; Renold, E. and McGeeney, E. (2017) [Informing the Future Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales](#). Cardiff University

³ Renold, E. et al (2023) [“We have to educate ourselves”: how young people are learning about relationships, sex and sexuality](#). London: NSPCC

⁴ Welsh Government (2021) [The Curriculum for Wales – Relationships and Sexuality Education Code](#)



that they need to cover within the three learning strands (relationships and identity; sexual health and well-being; and empowerment, safety and respect), we are concerned that it does not contain enough information for schools on *how* to implement a whole school approach to RSE. A whole school approach to RSE will enable entire schools and communities to have a shared understanding of their responsibilities to create a safe and healthy environment for children, and to be able to recognise and respond to signs of concerning behaviour or disclosures of abuse and neglect. This is a significant gap in support for schools, and **we would like the inquiry to recommend that Welsh Government develop detailed cross-curricular whole school approach to RSE guidance.** Whole school approach guidance should include illustrative case studies, bringing RSE to life and demonstrating *how* schools can engage with parents, communities and young people to develop inclusive, relevant and rights-respecting relationships and sexuality education that safeguards children

Access to evidence based RSE materials & resources

Schools also need access to high quality, evidenced based resources to help facilitate the teaching of RSE. We were pleased to note Welsh Government's intention to prioritise a review of the RSE resources available to schools and learners⁵. **We ask that the inquiry probes Welsh Government's progress on undertaking the review of RSE resources, and any findings which highlights gaps in resources needed for schools.**

The professional learning and other support settings are receiving to ensure effective implementation of the Curriculum for Wales and the ALN system.

RSE Professional Development

One of the areas we feel it is important for the Committee to scrutinise in relation to the implementation of RSE, is the support that is available for schools and teachers. High-quality RSE is dependent upon having a well-trained workforce with the confidence to co-construct relevant content with children and young people. NSPCC Cymru is concerned that teachers feel ill equipped and do not have the knowledge, skills and confidence they need to teach about sex and relationships. Findings from a joint survey by the NSPCC and teaching union NASUWT showed that nearly half of secondary school teachers (46%) do not feel confident about delivering RSE, and 86% felt they needed more resources and training in RSE⁶. Findings from Estyn's (2021) report also highlighted that all schools felt they needed more training and support to deliver relationships and sexuality education⁷. Without sufficient training there is a real risk that schools may not provide RSE in a way that supports and safeguards all children and young people.

⁵ See [Written Statement: Sexual harassment and abuse in education settings](#). June 16th, 2021

⁶ NSPCC and NASUWT (2022) [Half of secondary school teachers do not feel confident delivering RSE](#).

⁷ Estyn (2021) [We don't tell our teachers - Experiences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils in Wales](#)



Children and young people have also been calling for better training and support for teachers and schools delivering RSE. In 2022, the cross-party group on preventing child sexual abuse held a young person and lived experience led event on peer-on-peer sexual abuse and online harms, in response to Estyn's (2021) report on experiences of peer on peer sexual harassment in secondary schools⁸. One of the key themes raised by the young people leading the event, was the importance of RSE training for school staff. They talked about the need to make sure teachers were supported so they can confidently deliver the curriculum. Recently commissioned research by the NSPCC looking at what young people are learning about relationships, sex and sexuality, also highlighted the need to make sure teachers are better trained to provide RSE, so they can be knowledgeable, confident and comfortable in how they educate young people about relationships and sexuality⁹.

NSPCC Cymru is concerned about the gap in RSE training and support for schools and has been calling on Welsh Government to establish a funded national programme of professional learning on RSE, for all school staff. This is needed to support schools to map out the issues that are most relevant to their learners and be more confident in creating and delivering their new inclusive RSE curriculum. As part of this training, it is vital for teachers to receive comprehensive training to ensure they are equipped with the tools to help spot signs and symptoms of trauma and abuse, sensitively interact with a child who is disclosing and are confident in taking action and supporting children through the disclosure journey. It is also important that within a whole school approach, where the workforce required to create a safe and healthy school environment goes beyond teachers, that RSE training (appropriate to their role) is available to all school staff. While wider school staff may not directly teach school children, staff will regularly engage with children, or have insight into their peer groups and norms, familial situation, and usual or unusual behaviour. A whole school approach to safeguarding requires the entire school to have a shared understanding of their responsibilities, and are equally able to recognise and respond consistently and appropriately to signs of concerning behaviour. We believe that without investment in professional learning, there is a real risk that inclusive, high-quality RSE will not be realised. **We ask that the inquiry scrutinise Welsh Government plans for professional learning on RSE, outlining what training and support is currently being provided for schools. We also feel there is merit in the Committee launching a short inquiry that explores how confident primary and secondary teachers feel about designing and delivering RSE, and what training is needed to better support them.**

⁸ Ibid

⁹ Renold, E. et al (2023) "[We have to educate ourselves](#)": how young people are learning about relationships, sex and sexuality. London: NSPCC



Support for the community

For a whole school approach to RSE to be effective, we also must consider support for the wider community, so they can play their part and create a social safety net to keep children safe. We would like to see support and awareness raising within local communities around schools, so they know how to spot the signs of abuse, including peer on peer sexual harassment, and what to do if they think a child has been or is at risk of being abused or neglected. This should be informed by contextual safeguarding approaches, which ensures local business owners such as shops, takeaways, cafes, school coach drivers and park wardens recognise their role in supporting and safeguarding young people. **We feel it would be helpful for the inquiry to explore what provision Welsh Government has put in place to support communities to better safeguard children.**

RSE Leadership

To support the implementation of RSE, NSPCC Cymru have been calling for all primary and secondary schools to have a dedicated and specialist trained RSE lead practitioner. These leadership roles are vital in schools, as they can help guide and develop high quality and relevant RSE and embed a whole school approach. A fully trained RSE lead practitioner should also have specialist knowledge in safeguarding and will be able to support school staff to confidently deliver trauma-informed RSE, and training on how to manage disclosures of abuse and neglect. NSPCC Cymru also supports the recommendation that there is a RSE advisor at local authority level¹⁰. We were pleased to note Welsh Government commitment for every school, and Local Authority to have a designated lead responsible for supporting learners with relationships and sexuality education¹¹. **We ask that the inquiry establishes whether all primary and secondary schools and local authorities do now have a designated RSE lead in place, and if not, where the gaps are.**

¹⁰ See Renold, E. and McGeeney (2017) [The Future of the Sex and Relationships Education Curriculum in Wales](#). Welsh Government

¹¹ See [Written Statement: Sexual harassment and abuse in education settings](#). June 16th, 2021

