



Eich cyf/Your ref P-06-1393
Ein cyf/Our ref JMEWL/02094/23

Jack Sargeant MS
Chair - Petitions committee
Senedd Cymru
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 1SN

12 January 2024

Dear Jack,

Thank you for your letter of 15 December to inform me of *Petition P-06-1393 - Empowering Parental Choice: Opt-Out Rights and Inclusive Involvement in the Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Program*, which is currently collecting signatures.

The Welsh Government's responsibility is to ensure that young people, through public education, have access to learning that supports them to understand and discuss their rights and the rights of others. We want education to help our children to develop as healthy, confident individuals, ready for the next chapter in their life after school.

Why RSE Is Mandatory?

RSE is a mandatory element of the Curriculum for Wales because it is central to keeping them safe and healthy. All young people should have the right to access information that protects them and keeps them safe from harm. This includes learning about healthy relationships; keeping safe online and offline; anti-bullying; learning about violence against women and being confident to raise issues with responsible adults. This is critical to building a society which treats others with understanding and empathy, whatever their ethnicity, religion, social economic background, disability, sex, gender or sexuality.

Parents have a central role to play in supporting their children. There is also a crucial role for schools: in a world where there is so much incorrect and misleading information and harmful material circulating online, schools are teaching children and young people about the importance of building healthy relationships and self-esteem; encouraging learners to value themselves; recognise and communicate their feelings and form friendships.

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Rydym yn croesawu derbyn gohebiaeth yn Gymraeg. Byddwn yn ateb gohebiaeth a dderbynnir yn Gymraeg yn Gymraeg ac ni fydd gohebu yn Gymraeg yn arwain at oedi.

We welcome receiving correspondence in Welsh. Any correspondence received in Welsh will be answered in Welsh and corresponding in Welsh will not lead to a delay in responding.

The statutory guidance is very clear that we expect schools to work closely with parents and carers to make sure they understand what their children are learning. It states that schools and settings should have clear lines of communication in relation to RSE and should engage with learners, parents, carers and the wider community, to engage with learning and teaching in RSE. It should be ensured that all resources to be used in schools and settings are relevant, reputable, developmentally appropriate, inclusive and sensitive to learners' needs, and materials can be shared with parents in advance.

Respecting Diverse Beliefs

Learning is also legally required to be objective, critical and pluralistic as set out in the Statutory Guidance:

'By pluralistic we mean that that where questions of values are concerned, schools and settings must provide a range of views on a given subject, commonly held within society. This also means providing a range of factual information on RSE issues. In all schools, where they explore specific beliefs or views, this must include a range of other faith and non-religious views on the issue.

For example, schools may include learning about current tensions, disagreements or debates within society, or they may explore different perspectives within faiths on issues. Developing this pluralism is important in ensuring learners develop as informed citizens who are aware of and sensitive to a range of different opinions, values and beliefs. This supports them to engage with and navigate potential tensions.

A good understanding of learners' views, emerging values and backgrounds is central to developing this pluralism. Positive relationships with wider communities can help to create a constructive context for exploring aspects and tensions in a sensitive way'.

Inclusivity is also a key principle that underpins our vision within the new curriculum. Learning should be underpinned by a collective whole-school approach that is inclusive to ensure all learners see themselves and each other in what they learn. The RSE guidance, which all schools must consider, specifically highlights the importance of children's right to follow their religion.

Engagement with Parents and Carers and Right to Withdraw

We expect schools to keep parents and carers fully aware of what is being learned and why, with opportunity for questions and clarification. The RSE Code has been published to give parents and carers clarity and transparency about what their children will learn and when. A well-supported, proactive approach by schools should help dispel any legitimate concerns that parents and carers may have in relation to RSE provision. This will also help to reassure them of the positive nature of RSE by setting out the proposed learning and resources to be used at the different developmental phases.

The RSE Code is also clear that learning must be developmentally appropriate for every child; which means learners must not learn about subjects that they're not ready for. Schools should only introduce learning when they are confident that it is developmentally appropriate for learners.

The Curriculum for Wales requirements and the decision to remove the right to withdraw were the subject of extensive consultation. Since 2018, RSE has been through full and wide-ranging consultation and through the scrutiny process in the Senedd.

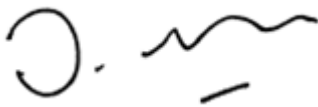
During the judicial review into RSE in 2022, the High Court rejected the characterisation of the RSE curriculum by the claimants, and it found in favour of the Welsh Government on all counts. Throughout the development of this policy, we have been clear that RSE is intended to keep children safe and to promote respect and healthy relationships and this was affirmed by the court. In particular, the judge said:

- *“...In my judgment, both the Code and the Guidance reflect the general spirit of the (European Convention of Human Rights) as an instrument designed to maintain and promote the ideals and values of a modern liberal democracy, including the values of tolerance, respect and equality.”*

We continue to work with local authorities, school improvement services and schools to support them in rolling out this aspect of the new curriculum and to help them engage with parents, carers and communities, including with resources to support teaching and learning. This includes the [RSE toolkit](#) on Hwb that has information in twelve languages.

In summary, we are clear that mandatory RSE is about keeping children safe from harm and protecting their mental and emotional well-being. RSE is legally required to be pluralistic, meaning schools must provide a range of information that is factual and reflects the range of views commonly held in society - the High Court ruled that the RSE Code is consistent with this. Finally, schools are expected to work closely with parents as they develop and deliver RSE and parents should be able to see materials being used. If they have any concerns, schools should have clear processes in place to address and respond to these issues.

Yours sincerely,



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Gweinidog y Gymraeg ac Addysg
Minister for Education and Welsh Language