

PaJeS Briefing Note – RSHE Guidance Update

The Department for Education published revised RSHE statutory guidance in July 2025, which comes into force in September 2026. While maintaining existing flexibility for faith schools to teach distinctive religious perspectives, the guidance introduces significant new requirements around parental transparency and contemporary issues including online safety and mental health.

1. "SHOULD/MUST" FRAMEWORK MAINTAINED

The fundamental "should/must" framework that allows schools to depart from guidance with good reasons remains intact, with enhanced flexibility for age-appropriate sequencing and strengthened provisions for cultural and religious sensitivity. This framework means schools must comply with "must" statements but can professionally justify departures from "should" guidance based on their educational approach and community needs.

2. ENHANCED CLARITY ON AGE-APPROPRIATE TEACHING

The guidance explicitly confirms schools' professional autonomy over curriculum timing: "We have decided not to introduce age limits on certain topics as on balance, we think it is important not to restrict schools from being able to use their professional judgment over when topics should be taught for the benefit and safety of pupils." This means that:

- There are no mandatory age restrictions on any RSHE topics
- Schools retain full professional judgment on timing
- Can tailor content for immature year groups or specific needs

3. FLEXIBILITY AND DEVELOPMENTAL ADAPTATION

Professional Judgment Protected: "Schools should develop the curriculum to be relevant, age and stage appropriate and accessible to pupils in their area, where appropriate working with local partners and other bodies to understand specific local issues and ensure needs are met." SEND Principles Applied to Maturity: "there may be a need to tailor content and teaching to meet the specific needs of pupils at different developmental stages. As with all teaching for these subjects, schools should ensure that their teaching is sensitive, age-appropriate, developmentally appropriate and delivered with reference to the law."

4. MAINTENANCE OF TEACHING THROUGH RELIGION'S LENS

The guidance maintains and reinforces existing protections for faith schools: "RSHE should be sensitive to the religious background of pupils, and schools must ensure they comply

with the relevant provisions of the Equality Act 2010, under which religion or belief are amongst the protected characteristics." "All schools may teach about faith perspectives on these topics. In particular, schools with a religious character may teach their distinctive faith perspective on relationships, and balanced debate may take place about issues that are contentious... Schools should be clear when they are delivering content that reflects religious belief."

5. ENHANCED PARENTAL RIGHTS AND CONSULTATION

When schools review or develop policies, it is mandatory to consult with parents: "Schools must proactively engage and consult parents when they develop and review their policy, ensuring parents understand that effective RSHE is important for promoting and protecting the wellbeing of all children."

There is an explicit requirement in the updated policies for complete material transparency: "Schools should ensure that parents are able to view all curriculum materials used to teach RSHE on request... Where contractual clauses exist that seek to prevent schools sharing any material at all with parents, they are void and unenforceable."

We would therefore suggest that you review and update existing RSHE policies through renewed parent consultation and ensure that all material is available for parents in some manner (even if upon request).

6. CLARITY ON CONTESTED TOPICS (GENDER IDENTITY)

This guidance removes schools from being battlegrounds for contested issues and explicitly states that there is no space for teaching about gender identity: "schools should be mindful that beyond the facts and the law about biological sex and gender reassignment there is significant debate, and they should be careful not to endorse any particular view or teach it as fact. For example, they should not teach as fact that all people have a gender identity."

7. NEW CURRICULUM CONTENT AREAS

A number of topics have been significantly expanded, including;

- Online Safety (Pages 15-16): AI chatbots and deepfakes, digital manipulation and online scams and social media characteristics and risks
- Mental Health (Pages 25-27, 27-28): Suicide prevention (requires professional training), eating disorders, anxiety and depression characteristics
- Sexual Harassment Prevention (Pages 17-18, 38-39): Detailed requirements for addressing sexual violence and harassment, positive masculinity and challenging misogyny
- Legal Education (Page 30, 35): Medical consent and Gillick competence, criminal exploitation and county lines

Practical Next Steps

Immediate Actions (Academic Year 2025-26):

1. **Policy Review and Update:** "Schools must proactively engage and consult parents when they develop and review their policy" (Page 4) : "Schools should take steps to pro-actively engage parents and make sure they are aware of what is being taught in RSHE" (page 33)
 - Review current policies against new requirements
 - Engage parents in meaningful consultation on policy updates
 - Document rationale for any age-sequencing decisions based on religious/community needs
 - Develop robust systems for material sharing with parents
2. **Contract Audit: Guidance Reference:** "Where contractual clauses exist that seek to prevent schools sharing any material at all with parents, they are void and unenforceable" (Page 34)
 - Review any external provider agreements
 - Remove any clauses restricting material sharing with parents
3. **Staff Training: Guidance Reference:** "Schools should consult mental health professionals and put in place high quality, evidence-based staff training before addressing suicide directly with secondary aged pupils" (Page 25)
 - Professional development on mental health content (mandatory for suicide prevention)
 - Training on integrating Jewish perspectives with statutory requirements
 - Understanding of enhanced parental consultation requirements