

Press release: New relationships and health education in schools

All schools will teach children about good physical and mental health, how to stay safe on and offline, and the importance of healthy relationships under bold new plans published today by Education Secretary Damian Hinds.

Under the proposals, all pupils will study compulsory health education as well as new reformed Relationships Education in primary school and Relationships and Sex Education in secondary school.

The guidance – which was last updated in 2000 – will become compulsory in all schools across the country from September 2020, and will put in place the building blocks needed for positive and safe relationships of all kinds.

Schools will be supported as they prepare to teach the new subjects and will be able to begin doing so as soon as the materials are ready and available from September 2019, building on the existing best practice that will be shared by high performing schools.

By making health education compulsory we will ensure pupils are taught about the benefits of a healthier lifestyle, what determines their physical health and how to build mental resilience and wellbeing. It will also make sure children and young people learn how to recognise when they and others are struggling with mental health and how to respond.

The proposals, which follow the publication of the Childhood Obesity Plan and the Children and Young People's Mental Health Green Paper, will ensure that the importance of good physical and mental health are an integral part of the updated subjects.

Education Secretary Damian Hinds said:

I want to make sure that our children are able to grow up to become happy and well-rounded individuals who know how to deal with the challenges of the modern world. Part of this is making sure they are informed about how to keep themselves safe and healthy and have good relationships with others.

Many of today's problems did not exist when we last gave schools guidance on how to teach Relationships and Sex Education 18 years ago. The action we're taking is important to help support teachers and schools design a curriculum that will enrich their pupils in an age appropriate way.

Good physical and mental health is also at the heart of ensuring young people are ready for the adult world. By making health education compulsory we are giving young people the tools they need to be ready to thrive when they leave school.

Under the updated guidance, teachers will talk to primary school pupils in an age appropriate way about the features of healthy friendships, family relationships and other relationships they are likely to encounter. At secondary school, teachers will build on the foundation of Relationships Education in primary and, at the appropriate time, extend teaching to include intimate relationships as well.

At both primary and secondary, pupils will learn about staying safe online – complementing the existing computing curriculum – and how to use technology safely, responsibly and respectfully. Lessons will also cover how to keep personal information private, and help young people navigate the virtual world, challenge harmful content and balance online and offline worlds.

The new guidance has been developed in response to a national call for evidence earlier this year and includes topics like mental wellbeing, consent, keeping safe online, physical health and fitness and LGBT issues. It will now be subject to a further 12-week consultation on the content and how the subjects are taught.

As well as teaching about the benefits of healthy eating and keeping fit, the new compulsory health education will include content on the prevention of health problems. It will help support the development of qualities such as confidence, resilience, self-respect and self-control. Good quality education on wider social and economic issues will continue to be taught in schools across the country through PSHE or other subjects, for example teaching about financial issues through maths and citizenship.

Barnardo's Chief Executive, Javed Khan said:

We welcome the proposed guidance, and its focus on the issues Barnardo's has campaigned for such as consent, healthy relationships and staying safe online. We are pleased to see emotional, reproductive and mental health included as requested by our young service users.

It's vital teachers have quality resources and proper training so they can deliver sensitive subjects that are age-appropriate and answer any questions children have confidently. Schools must communicate regularly with parents to help them feel comfortable about what their children are being taught.