

Myth Busting: Information for schools

Answers to questions raised by parents and carers in Newham

Myth 1. 'Schools are teaching children to have sex'

As part of RSHE in some primary schools and as part of science in all secondary schools, children and young people are taught about human reproduction, but schools are not teaching or encouraging children or young people to have sex. Schools are giving them the skills and knowledge to make intelligent healthy decisions when they do decide to have sex, in line with their own morality, beliefs and their aspirations for their future. Research has shown (Sell 2019) that school is seen as a trusted source of RSHE for young people. It is important to give them the tools which mean they have the confidence and knowledge to say *no* to sex, or *yes*, or *not now, maybe in the future*. When Newham young people do choose to have sex, good quality RSHE can help equip them with knowledge, skills and understanding that will protect them physically, and also emotionally and spiritually, helping them to make positive decisions around any sexual activity they may choose to have. For some that may not be until they are married or much later in their life.

Myth 2. 'Schools are teaching children to masturbate'

We have had a leaflet handed out at schools in Newham saying this was happening. The organisation when challenged admitted they had no evidence this was going on in Newham and have now changed their leaflet and website accordingly. However, schools may talk about wet dreams and erections as part of puberty, especially for the boys who may become aware of these changes to their bodies.

Myth 3. 'No-one considers a pupil's religious beliefs when teaching RSHE'

Schools should be mindful of all their pupils' backgrounds when teaching RSHE, whatever that may be. Newham, because of our commitment to respecting differing faith groups, as well as other backgrounds our pupils may have, has employed, as its RSHE advisor, someone who has completed an extensive research study, using the voices of young people to explore what constitutes good quality, faith- and student-sensitive RSHE. This research, carried out at UCL Institute of Education, fits well with the borough's commitment to faith-sensitive and student-sensitive RSHE and informs the borough's plans and training concerning RSHE. It is important that whilst faith is respected and also talked about in RSHE, so are other belief systems, and RSHE should be sensitive to pupils or students from all differing backgrounds.

Myth 4. 'Schools are promoting LGBT+ relationships'

Schools should not be advocating LGBT+ relationships over any other relationship. However, they will be talking about LGBT+ relationships and families in an age-appropriate way in RSHE. All people and loving families, including those who are LGBT+, have much to give society. Schools have a duty to present modern British society and educate children and young people about diversity, inclusion, and equality for all groups, including faith groups, as mentioned in the Equality Act 2010. Pupil- and student-sensitive RSHE can also be used to make sure other children and young people from minority groups not mentioned in the 2010 Act are included and valued too; children such as looked after children.



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“Parents who object to same-sex relationships or who do not accept non-conformist gender identities are, of course, free to make this clear to their children - whether those views are the product of religion or not. Indeed, that is their right and it is protected under the ECHR. But the existence of LGBT+ people and same-sex parents is not a "belief". It is a fact, and it may be a fact which pupils, their friends, relatives and/or parents are living with. As such, parents' ECHR and EA rights do not give them the right to impose their views on others, much less to discriminate against or otherwise harm people because of their protected characteristics. This is of particular relevance when they seek to do so via a public body, such as a school.” (Liberty 2019)

Myth 5. ‘Religious people are sex negative and narrow minded’

Most religions are rooted in a very sex positive narrative. Sex is seen as something to be enjoyed and valued, although it is true to say that most religions expect sex to occur within a moral framework, normally marriage.

Myth 6. ‘Schools are sexualising children at too young an age’

Schools need to think carefully about what they teach children and young people, making sure it is age appropriate. Knowing the context of our pupils’ lives, what they see and hear around them, as well as keeping them safe, are big drivers for schools.

Safeguarding children and young people is a very important element of RSHE. An example of how schools can help children express themselves clearly is the use of accepted shared language, the words ‘vulva’ and ‘penis’ as external organs do not lead to a child understanding a sexual act, but does give them an easily understood, common vocabulary should they need to explain something in everyday life or something that has happened to them that they did not like. Parents/carers are of course able to use family names for various parts of their body at home, but in schools ‘proper’ or scientific words will be used.

Myth 7. ‘It is parents/carers from just one community that are causing problems for RSHE’

It is not just one community, individuals from many different groups (religious and secular) have raised concerns around the new RSHE legislation. These concerns are all taken very seriously when schools, advisors and council representatives explore the content ethos & policy concerning RSHE.

Myth 8. ‘The school are making my child do sex education and I do not want them to’

Parents/carers have the right to withdraw their children from sex education, other than that included in the National Curriculum for Science, up until their child is three terms from their sixteenth birthday. This is separate to relationship and health education which is statutory. In primary schools the parents/carers have an absolute right and in secondary schools it is at the discretion of the head teacher, although the head must have very strong and particular reasons for denying permission. Parents/carers must write to the school to withdraw their child from sex education outside of the science curriculum and are likely to be asked to come to school for a meeting to discuss their concerns. Parents/carers are also likely to be asked to a meeting at the school to view materials before sex education is taught, especially at primary schools.



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