

Statutory Changes to the RSE guidance for Primary Schools

The DfE published the updated statutory guidance for Relationships, Sex and Health Education towards the end of the summer term 2025, replacing the 2019 version.

New content for primary (KS1/KS2)

- Vaping is a new addition — from primary level, pupils should be taught the facts about vaping and the risks of nicotine addiction.
- Personal safety now includes fire safety and travel safety (e.g. around water, roads and railways), for both primary and secondary.

Sex education

- Sex education remains non-compulsory in primary schools, though the DfE still recommends it and now specifies this should take place in Year 5 and/or Year 6. The parental right to withdraw from sex education remains.

Family/relationships teaching

- Primary schools are now strongly encouraged to include same-sex parents along with other family arrangements when teaching about healthy, loving relationships.

Gender identity

- Schools should not teach as fact that all people have a gender identity, and should be mindful to avoid suggesting social transition is a simple solution to feelings of distress or discomfort. The guidance cautions against external materials that perpetuate stereotypes or come from organisations with a strong partisan view on this contested topic.

Anatomical Terminology:

- Health education now emphasizes correct, biological names for body parts, including genitalia, to support safeguarding and reduce stigma.

Mental health

- In primary, the focus is on pupils developing emotional regulation and learning to cope with everyday worries, plus knowing when and how to ask for help.
- Teachers are advised to take particular care not to discuss instructions or methods of self-harm or suicide.

Overall tone/approach

- The DfE emphasises that where schools choose to cover sensitive topics, teaching should be age-appropriate and respectful of all children, including those with no familiarity with the topics. The primary-phase guidance opens with guiding principles emphasising pupil/parent engagement, positivity, careful sequencing and skilled delivery.
- Parents' right to review RSHE resources has been reinforced, and the right to request withdrawal from sex education remains in place.