

DfE to issue more guidance on Sex Education and parents rights

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The DfE has recently laid its draft Regulations on Relations, Sex and Health Education before Parliament and has published accompanying draft statutory guidance. These Regulations intend to make the teaching of these subjects compulsory in schools (specific elements being phase dependant) from September 2020.

There has been a high level of interest in this topic and wide ranging commentary on the content of the curriculum particularly around sex education. The Regulations do allow some flexibility in their approach and leaves intact the right of parents to withdraw their child from sex education, save for biological aspects of human growth and reproduction that form part of the National Science Curriculum. The new position is that parents will be able to withdraw pupils until three terms before their child's 16th birthday; however, headteachers can refuse the withdrawal in 'exceptional circumstances.' There have been concerns that schools could abuse this power. The DfE has stated that it will issue further guidance on handling these requests so as to reflect current thinking and give more shape to the plans the DfE intended. It is likely the situations will be rare and unique and there will be no definitive list provided.

There are other changes in this area such as giving pupils the right to 'opt in' to sex education classes as they approach 16 years old, thereby giving pupils' autonomy over their own education and which is something schools will have to translate into their policies. This is going to be an area which needs careful thought and planning to ensure that schools can deliver teaching in this area by the right people, at the right level. Open discussions with the school community will help young people make safe and informed choices.

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