



Spotlight issue

Teacher training and the quality of school-based learning

The purpose of the spotlight issues series is to highlight themes or topics which have arisen across parental contributions. While these issues are reported across chapters, these short papers highlight key aspects for further reflection.

RSHP (Relationships, Sexual health and Parenthood) learning is facilitated across nursery, primary and secondary school. It is delivered by practitioners and teachers who will have come into their profession as qualified nursery practitioners, primary school teachers or subject-based secondary school teachers. If they have received training or other support to undertake the role of RSHP educator this will have come whilst in post. What is available by way of training or support will be dependent on their school or education authority or local NHS partner; this will vary across the country.

In small group chats and in responses to the national survey, parents expressed concern that teachers facilitating school-based RSHP learning might not have adequate training to give them the confidence and skills to do the job well. Without training there are concerns about whether learning is consistent across settings.

I am unclear on three things. First, whether the school has a unified programme, so you know all teachers doing the same thing in parallel. Second, I don't know how teachers are trained to talk about this. Is my child's teacher trained to do this? Then third, how is it realised? She is a great teacher, but how does she do it, I trust her, she's great, but how does she do this? A lecture? Slides? Discussion?

(Group chat 10)

Only concerns are that teachers themselves are properly trained and have the knowledge and confidence to engage with a group of pupils and disseminate good quality information and training

(Survey response/parent of 12–18-year-old)

I think a problem here is that teachers aren't qualified to teach this curriculum. They are awkward themselves, and they are the ones teaching it. How are the kids supposed to be comfortable then? Maybe a science teacher might feel more comfortable. But I know making it biology doesn't deal with the emotional side. And they need both.

(Group chat 24)

The learning my children have had has been very dependent on the teacher delivering the RSHP lesson and whether they feel confident enough to deliver the more sensitive topics.

(Survey response/parent of 12–18-year-old)

Parents can be supportive of RSHP learning in school but concerned about the quality of that experience.

I fully support the curriculum and its current content. I think it's vitally important that young people are taught this, and I think the way it is done with gradual introduction across age groups is ideal for really embedding it. However, my daughter has experienced some teachers who are clearly either embarrassed/uncomfortable or are not delivering it as intended and I do find that slightly concerning for those in the class who don't come home and speak to their parents about it!

(Survey response/parent of 9–11-year-old)

I think learning at primary was good. My daughter would talk about what she learned. I think when they get to secondary the issue is more about the quality of what they are getting, the teaching. How confident are the teachers are delivering this subject?

(Group chat 19)

I think it's vital that the teacher delivering the teaching is fully invested in the lesson, that they also have a good understanding and able to answer questions fully. Not embarrassed or shy away from the topics as my children have told me they get a video, and the teacher walks away.

(Survey response/parent of 12–18-year-old)

Parents of children with Additional Support Needs/disability have stressed the importance of teacher competence, confidence and the relevance of approaches and materials for their children.

I'm not convinced that the teachers who are teaching sex and relationship education in the mainstream, with our children in the room, have a good enough education and training themselves on what it means to be a neurodiverse young person.

(Group chat 35)

There's a lot of pressure on schools, especially special schools, but maybe just that shift so that schools try to bring parents along on this journey as well. It really frustrates me when other services say that school has staff trained to do whatever my child might need. But I don't actually know what training staff had had on issues and learning like this. Maybe more of a Q&A, us and the school staff, thinking about our individual children, they are so different.

(Group chat 14)

For parents with a religious faith, it is important that teacher training around the delivery of RSHP learning acknowledges the role and importance of faith and culture in the child's home environment.

The training teachers get to deliver this curriculum needs to include learning about different cultures.

(Group chat 36)

For parents with concerns about school-based learning, a lack of communication from school (see the chapter Supporting Parents) is tied to concerns about teacher skills and competence.

I feel we have to be very careful regarding how much information we give young children as whilst knowledge and awareness is essential, we don't want to expose them to information that may cause psychological harm/deprive them of a childhood. I'd want to know about the content of such delivery in school and who is trained to deliver it/what that training looks like.

(Survey response/parent of 9–11-year-old)

This parent suggested that if teachers do not have the training and skills development they require, other professionals may be better suited to the challenges of delivering RSHP learning.

I would prefer these subjects to be led and taught by skilled professionals who know how to talk about these subjects, how to have open conversations and how to read a room and know when something has become 'too much' and that needs to be discussed too. Someone who is trained to see if someone is being triggered in

the room... this is a big ask for teachers who have minimal child psychology in their training to undertake alongside their existing workload. Yes, teach my children but make sure it's the correct person walking into the classroom to respectfully, with care and consent start teaching these young pliable people!

(Survey response/parent of 9–11-year-old)

This parent posed a question that nurseries and schools can address by informing parents about the training and support nursery and school staff receive.

You love your kids; you love them the most. You want to send them to a safe place, where they will grow and flourish. We feel strong enough to challenge if something doesn't feel right, inclusive, but not every parent feels strong enough. Do teachers receive training or not?

(Group chat 4)