

Sex Education



Wales could be “leading the way” in relationships and sex education (RSE) in schools after announcing an overhaul of its curriculum.

The changes, which include the subject being renamed relationships and sexuality education, were announced by Wales’ education secretary, Kirsty Williams, who said the days of traditional sex education were “long gone.”

In a departure from the traditional teaching approaches, and coming 30 years after the introduction of section 28, which banned the “promotion of homosexuality in schools”, the subject will be LGBT inclusive. It will also focus on wider issues such as consent, domestic abuse and respecting diversity.

It will form a statutory part of Wales’ new curriculum, which comes into force in 2022, for all children aged from five to 16 and will be embedded across the curriculum rather than taught as a separate subject.

The announcement follows a report by Wales’ sex and relationships education expert panel, which concluded that RSE was often too biological and too negative, with not enough attention given to rights, gender equity, emotions and relationships.

The announcement was welcomed by charities and campaigners including Stonewall Cymru. The charity’s director, Andrew White, was a member of the expert panel and said his charity had lobbied for years for this change.

He said: “It’s great news, particularly as this week is the anniversary of the introduction of section 28 and our research shows that a majority of LGBT young people here in Wales have heard nothing about LGBT issues in the classroom.

“The legacy of section 28 unfortunately still lives on and this change will go some way to readdressing the balance.”

He said it was important that issues were discussed in the classroom. “If we don’t, those conversations will happen on the web with sometimes unreliable sources.”

The panel’s chair, Emma Renold, a professor of childhood studies at Cardiff University, said the changes would mean sex and the issues surrounding it would not be limited to biology lessons. “It will broaden it out so you can cover the issues in humanities and expressive arts as well as science for example,” she said.

We identified what constitutes high-quality RSE provision and provided the Welsh government a blueprint because we were calling for a major overhaul. It’s not just about curriculum content but about developing the infrastructure, teacher training and support systems that are necessary to ensure it actually works.

She said the changes were more progressive than in England and could mean Wales soon be leading the way internationally when it comes to sex education.

Eliri Butler, the chief executive of Welsh Women’s Aid, said the new curriculum was a positive step towards eradicating violence and abuse.

She said: “It’s vital that children and young people learn about age-appropriate relationships and sexuality education, and have access to high-quality learning and support about equality, safety, sexual consent and healthy relationships.”