



Girlguiding Headquarters
17-19 Buckingham Palace Road
London SW1W 0PT
T: 020 7834 6242
F: 020 7828 8317
W: www.girlguiding.org.uk

Rt Hon Gillian Keegan
Secretary of State for Education
Department for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
20 Great Smith Street
SW1P 3BT

20 November 2022

An open letter to the Secretary of State for Education on RSE in schools

Dear Secretary of State for Education

In advance of International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the Girlguiding Advocate panel – a group of Girlguiding young members – are writing to you to demand better quality relationship and sex education (RSE) in schools to tackle violence against women and girls.

Girlguiding's latest research shows only 36% of children and young people aged 11 to 17 have learned about sexual consent at school, despite it being a mandatory part of the curriculum. There are clearly inconsistencies in how RSE is being delivered across the country, leaving it unable to have the nationwide impact it needs to.

In 2015 our sexual harassment in schools campaign called for mandatory RSE. And in 2017, we celebrated a turning point when the government announced it would be made compulsory in England, becoming officially statutory from 1 September 2020. We understand that the pandemic delayed the embedding of RSE, however, this is having real consequences for young people's safety and wellbeing.

Our research in June 2021 highlighted that 67% of girls in secondary school had experienced sexual harassment from other students - an increase from 55% in 2014. That same month Ofsted's report into sexual harassment revealed the shocking scale and normalisation of harassment. Government promised to do more then. Urgent action is needed now.

We want schools to be safe spaces where pupils are free to learn. Creating environments in which all children and young people can get the information they need to learn about sex, relationships, and the importance of consent. We believe that comprehensive RSE is vital in the prevention of sexual harassment, providing it's taught in an effective and impactful way. To allow young people to recognise unacceptable behaviour, RSE must include information and discussion around: sexual consent, healthy relationships and respect, online safety, violence against women and girls and gender stereotypes. And be inclusive of LGBTQ+ relationships, SEN needs and the experiences of girls of colour.

Along with other leading organisations in this area, we want our voices to be heard to inform how RSE is delivered. We are calling on you and the government to:

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen President: Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex
Chief Guide: Amanda Medler Chief Executive: Angela Salt OBE

Girlguiding UK is an operating name of The Guide Association. Incorporated by Royal Charter.
Registered charity in England and Wales number 306016. Registered charity in Scotland number SC038436.



- Renew the commitment to the delivery of RSE and aim for 100% of young people to be learning about consent.
- Publish guidance to help schools address sexual harassment and abuse, as was promised almost 18 months ago.
- Provide more support and training for teachers so they feel more skilled and confident.
- Support schools to take a whole-school approach to addressing sexual harassment, of which RSE is part of.
- Ensure schools listen to young people's voices to co-create and inform the RSE curriculum to ensure it meets their needs.

As young people directly impacted, we would be pleased to meet with you to discuss this important issue and look forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Girlguiding Advocate Panel

Supported by:

AVA (Against Violence and Abuse)

AWRC (Asian Women's Resource Centre)

British Youth Council

Brook

End Violence Against Women Coalition

Imkaan

Our Streets Now and Our Schools Now

Plan International UK, and members of the Plan International UK Youth Advisory Panel

Rape Crisis England & Wales

Refuge

School of Sexuality Education

South West Grid for Learning

White Ribbon UK

Patron: Her Majesty The Queen President: Her Royal Highness The Countess of Wessex
Chief Guide: Amanda Medler Chief Executive: Angela Salt OBE

Girlguiding UK is an operating name of The Guide Association. Incorporated by Royal Charter.
Registered charity in England and Wales number 306016. Registered charity in Scotland number SC038436.

