



Developing respect and understanding: The quality and impact of relationships and sexuality education in schools and pupil referral units

July 2026

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What we found



Well-being and safeguarding are at the heart of Relationships and Sexuality Education and positive relationships are embedded across school life



In nearly all cases there is a strong ethos of care and respect where schools and PRUs promote an inclusive culture, respectful relationships and understanding



In the strongest cases, pupil voice shapes provision and children of all ages enjoy discussing relationships and their life experiences



A progressive curriculum helps build relationships and understanding but there are inconsistencies and uneven experiences across many providers



Staff receive helpful training which raises their awareness but a shortage of specialist professional development impacts on their confidence and ability to discuss sensitive matters



There is inconsistent support to develop RSE both nationally and across local authorities for schools and PRUs and this prevents progress

- 1 We talked to pupils and staff and observed work in 30 schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) across Wales to look at the quality and impact of relationships and sexuality education (RSE). We found that, in the schools and PRUs visited, senior and middle leaders demonstrated a strong moral commitment to promoting pupils' well-being and healthy relationships as part of their whole school approach to mental and emotional health. In most of these schools and PRUs, leaders placed well-being at the centre of their strategic vision. They articulated clear values rooted in respect, kindness, understanding and inclusion and reflected these consistently in policies, behaviour systems and day-to-day practice. In many cases, leaders positioned RSE within a broader whole-school approach to well-being, safeguarding and inclusion

rather than treating it solely as a discrete subject. Inspectors noted that established pastoral systems and responsive safeguarding arrangements supported this work effectively. Leaders worked closely with health professionals, police liaison officers and third-sector organisations to respond to emerging concerns, including misogyny, online exploitation, harmful attitudes to gender norms and unhealthy peer relationships. These partnerships strengthened schools' capacity to respond to contextual risks. As a result of this strong practice, across most providers, nearly all pupils that we spoke to reported that they felt safe in school, valued and able to seek help when needed.

- 2 Many leaders used a suitable range of evidence to inform planning. This included safeguarding records, national and local well-being data, and findings from pupil voice activities. Most schools and PRUs had established appropriate mechanisms to capture pupil voice. In the majority of cases, pupils contributed to identifying priority topics and shaping aspects of provision. In the best examples, leaders used this insight to influence curriculum content and wider cultural initiatives, such as festivals and celebrations to promote diversity. However, in a minority of providers visited, leaders gathered pupils' views only periodically and did not consider this information well enough to be able to embed it in long-term planning.
- 3 Although many leaders mapped RSE across year groups, only a few considered secure and coherent progression from ages 3 to 11 or from 3 to 16. Mapping typically identified where topics appeared but did not evaluate the depth or the sequence of learning. Collaboration between primary and secondary schools was not evident in many cases and this led to limited cumulative progression. Overall, although leaders had established strong pastoral foundations and a strong ethos of inclusivity, quality assurance and evaluation was generally at an early stage. Even where there were strong examples of leaders adapting curriculum content in response to emerging issues, too often they evaluated provision by checking coverage of topics rather than measuring impact on pupils' knowledge, attitudes, and decision-making. Only a few providers evaluated the impact on pupils' personal and social development systematically over time.
- 4 Most schools prioritised professional learning appropriately and recognised that effective RSE required teachers and support staff who were confident to teach this aspect of the curriculum. Staff had accessed a broad range of training linked to safeguarding, trauma-informed practice, mental health, and curriculum planning. Although this professional learning strengthened the interpersonal foundations

necessary for effective RSE it did not normally lead to an increase in staff confidence in teaching more sensitive aspects of RSE. In many providers, designated leaders had undertaken targeted training and shared their learning with colleagues. Leaders also made productive use of external partnerships. School nurses, other health professionals, police officers and third-sector organisations contributed specialist expertise and supported staff development. Schools valued the continued involvement of school police officers despite changes to national funding arrangements.

- 5 Where leaders had aligned professional learning closely with curriculum planning and invested in building capacity within the school or PRU, staff confidence had strengthened and provision had become more coherent. However, a need for greater consistency in provision in order to embed high-quality practice was observed across providers. Lack of access to specialist training and insufficient time and resources for practitioners were notable shortcomings. Inspectors found that local authority and cluster support was variable. Many leaders benefited from local authority network meetings and opportunities to share practice with other schools and PRUs. This helped them develop their curriculum and ensure beneficial learning experiences for pupils. In a few areas, limited access to local authority support and a lack of specialist training constrained curriculum development. This contributed to variability in pupils' experiences.
- 6 Inspectors identified professional learning as a clear and consistent area for improvement across providers. Professional learning for teachers often focused on general well-being themes rather than subject-specific pedagogy. In order to provide good quality learning experiences in a safe and secure way for pupils' age and stage, careful attention to pedagogical methodology is needed. Staff across all schools and PRUs reported lower confidence in teaching sexuality education, addressing misogyny and harmful gender norms, supporting gender-diverse pupils and using accurate terminology. This resulted in variation in the quality and depth of delivery of these sensitive themes. It also led to insufficient coverage, especially in Phase 3 (from age 11) which was also reported by pupils themselves. In addition, time, funding and capacity presented ongoing challenges for schools and PRUs. Leaders frequently held multiple responsibilities and lacked protected time to develop RSE strategically. Financial pressures limited access to specialist providers. In a minority of schools, over-reliance on external contributors reduced sustainability, limited

opportunities to build internal expertise and often provided pupils with one-off or unrepeatable learning experiences.

- 7 Overall, we observed that provision for RSE supported pupils' general personal development effectively in most schools and PRUs visited. Leaders and teachers fostered an inclusive culture successfully, with many providers promoting equality and diversity clearly and consistently. This led to most pupils speaking positively about feeling respected. RSE was integrated well within the wider curriculum and pastoral framework. Broadly, pupils benefitted from learning that was age-appropriate and aligned with their developmental stage. Nevertheless, leaders did not always plan systematically for the inclusion of RSE within the wider curriculum. Overall, there was little coverage of topics such as sex, gender and sexuality. This depended heavily on individual staff confidence, their understanding of how to address sensitive topics and their ability to use the correct terminology.
- 8 In many schools, leaders designed broad and balanced curricula that revisited key themes. Typically, younger pupils in Phase 1 (from age 3) learned about love, kindness, and friendship. Pupils in Phase 2 (from age 7) explored equality, digital safety and healthy relationships. Older pupils in Years 10 and 11 (Phase 3) discussed topics such as consent, gender identity and abusive relationships. Cross-curricular links reinforced learning effectively in many cases. For example, pupils enjoyed exploring moral and social themes through literary texts and examined prejudice and propaganda in subjects within the humanities. These approaches helped pupils connect relationship learning to wider social understanding.
- 9 In most sessions across the age range, teachers, including teaching assistants working with younger pupils, encouraged discussion and reflection. In the primary phase, daily emotional check-ins supported pupils to express feelings openly. In the secondary phase, many teachers facilitated thoughtful discussions on pertinent issues. However, variability in staff confidence affected the depth and consistency of conversations in a minority of cases. Where staff confidence was lower, teachers relied heavily on structured schemes purchased by the school or one-off enrichment events provided by specialists. This practice limited progression in learning. Inclusion and representation of different groups also varied across the phases.
- 10 A noteworthy strength was how most schools and PRUs embedded positive messages about healthy relationships beyond formal learning sessions. Assemblies,

behaviour support systems and restorative approaches reinforced expectations consistently, particularly when linked to the providers' values and vision. Staff at all levels modelled respectful and friendly relationships which impacted positively on pupils' attitudes to school and their appreciation of how staff supported them. Many older pupils demonstrated considerable empathy and maturity in discussion with inspectors, which reflected the extent of their positive engagement in RSE.

- 11 In order to improve the quality and impact of RSE in the future, schools and PRUs would benefit from depending less on expanding provision and more on deepening the learning, particularly around sensitive topics. In order to do this, leaders would need to strengthen progression from phase to phase and embed age-appropriate inclusive themes systematically through the curriculum. Professional learning for subject-specific pedagogy would support building staff confidence in addressing complex issues and result in pupils accessing deeper learning in critical areas as they move towards adulthood.

Introduction

This thematic report is written in response to a request for advice from the Welsh Government, as outlined in Estyn's annual remit for 2025-2026. It focuses on the strategic leadership of relationships and sexuality education (RSE) within a whole school/PRU approach to mental health and well-being. It also considers the quality and impact of teaching and learning of RSE. The report provides an insight into strengths and areas for improvement in how schools plan, teach and promote the importance of healthy relationships and well-being. It highlights good practice and identifies barriers to the effective delivery of RSE across maintained schools and PRUs for children aged 3 to 16 years. The report considers pupils' attitudes towards learning about relationships and sexuality and the progress they make in their knowledge and understanding. It also highlights several examples of effective practice and engaging learning experiences in the schools and PRUs we visited.

The review explores four key areas:

- **Strategic leadership and planning of relationships and sexuality education:** the quality and effectiveness of leadership as part of a whole-school approach to mental health and well-being and in ensuring a thoughtful, supportive, and positive culture of respect.
- **The quality and impact of training and support for practitioners:** the support, guidance, and professional development available to schools and PRUs to help them plan and deliver good quality learning experiences across phases.
- **Teaching and learning in the classroom:** the suitability of learning experiences, the quality of teaching and their impact on pupils' development and attitudes.
- **Phase-specific learning experiences for pupils between 3-16 years of age:** helpful examples of age-appropriate and developmentally appropriate sessions observed during visits to providers.

The findings of this report draw on a range of evidence gathering activities, including:

- **Visits to a sample of schools and PRUs:** we visited seven secondary schools, 14 primary schools, five all-age schools, two special schools and two pupil referral units. These schools were selected as being broadly representative of schools across Wales, including variation in size, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, language medium and geographical location.
- **Range of activities:** during our visits we interviewed headteachers and PRU managers, along with senior or middle leaders with responsibility for leading

the health and well-being area of learning experience (AOLE) within Curriculum for Wales. We also met with groups of pupils in Year 3, Year 6, Year 9 and Year 11. We observed a range of learning sessions across all phases, including whole session observations, learning walks, tutor sessions, mass assemblies, and intervention groups.

- **Meetings with other stakeholders:** we met with a small number of stakeholders including representatives from Welsh Government and organisations who support provision and staff training on RSE.

Further detail about the evidence base for this report is included in the methodology section in the appendices. This report is intended for the Welsh Government, local authorities, school improvement services, teachers and leaders in education providers, and other organisations that support children and young people in Wales.

Background

Curriculum reform

Under the National Curriculum (2008), personal and social education (PSE) formed part of the core curriculum for all registered pupils aged 7 to 16 at maintained schools. Schools and PRUs were required to plan and deliver a broad and balanced programme of PSE that reflected the needs of their learners and local context. The themes identified in the PSE framework were:

- Active citizenship
- Health and emotional well-being
- Moral and spiritual development
- Preparing for lifelong learning
- Sustainable development and global citizenship

In addition to the PSE framework, schools received guidance on the development of sex education policies and the planning and delivery of sex and relationships education (SRE). The guidance gave parents the right to withdraw their child from sex education. There was no statutory requirement for primary schools to provide sex education as part of the core curriculum. It was for individual governing bodies, in consultation with parents and carers, to determine how best to approach sex education in accordance with learners' needs and the character and ethos of the school. In most schools, sex education was delivered predominantly through PSE lessons.

The introduction of [Curriculum for Wales](#), under [the Curriculum and Assessment \(Wales\) Act 2021](#), brought significant changes to expectations for the delivery of PSE and SRE. The reform marked a shift from a discrete PSE framework to a statutory approach with more integration of SRE within the new curriculum structure.

'Health and Well-being' became one of the six Areas of Learning and Experience (AoLE) within Curriculum for Wales. It provides a holistic framework for understanding physical, emotional and social well-being. It emphasises the importance of belonging, connection, and healthy relationships as fundamental contributors to learners' well-being. The five 'statements of what matters' within this AoLE encompass aspects previously included within the PSE framework, including the principle that *"Healthy relationships are fundamental to our well-being."*

In addition to the Health and Well-being AoLE, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) was introduced as a **mandatory** element of Curriculum for Wales for all learners aged 3 to 16 from September 2022. The Welsh Government introduced [Relationships and](#)

[Sexuality Statutory Guidance](#). From this time, all maintained schools and PRUs must design and deliver their curriculum in accordance with the mandatory RSE Code.

The RSE Code sets out mandatory requirements. Its legal basis is established in the Curriculum and Assessment (Wales) Act 2021. It specifies the themes and matters that must be included within RSE provision. RSE within Curriculum for Wales is structured around three broad strands:

- Relationships and identity
- Sexual health and well-being
- Empowerment, safety, and respect

The Act requires RSE provision to be developmentally appropriate for learners. In practice, this requires schools to take account of learners' age, developmental stage, knowledge, maturity, and any additional learning needs. Provision should reflect that learners of similar ages may have differing needs and experiences. As with all aspects of the curriculum, parents no longer have the right to withdraw their child from RSE lessons.

The RSE Code organises learning appropriately into three broad developmental phases:

- Phase 1: from age 3
- Phase 2: from age 7
- Phase 3: from age 11

The Health and Well-being AoLE provides a universal well-being framework, including physical health, emotional literacy, decision-making competence, critical engagement with social influences and relationship skills. Relationships and Sexuality Education builds on these foundations by applying them explicitly to relationships and sexuality in a context which is rights-based and focussed on safeguarding. This integrated structure represents a significant shift from the previous PSE framework, embedding relationships and sexuality education within a broader, statutory well-being curriculum and strengthening its safeguarding and rights-based foundations.

There are clear areas of alignment between the Health and Well-being AoLE and RSE. For example:

- The Health and Well-being healthy relationships statement aligns directly with the RSE strands of relationships and identity and empowerment, safety, and respect.
- The physical health statement within Health and Well-being underpins RSE's sexual health and well-being strand, where physical body changes and reproductive health are taught within broader health literacy.
- Statements relating to emotional well-being and decision-making support RSE's focus on consent, boundaries, peer pressure, discrimination, and help-seeking.

Research insights and key findings from relevant Estyn thematic reports

The Welsh Government, Estyn and educational research bodies have written widely about the key role that schools play in helping pupils to develop safe and respectful relationships. In March 2021, the Welsh Government published a comprehensive guidance document [Framework on embedding a whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being](#). The framework is intended to support schools, PRUs and education settings to review their own well-being landscape and develop plans to address weaknesses and build on strengths. The framework recognises that education providers alone cannot meet all the needs of a complex population of children and young people. It sets out the role of regional bodies, the National Health Service (NHS) and others, such as the third sector, in supporting them.

The framework was intended to support and complement the Curriculum for Wales, particularly the Health and Well-being AOLE. Further to the publication of the framework, the Welsh Government has published two research bulletins; 'Whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being', (Welsh Government 2024, 2023), to provide updates on the whole-school approach to emotional and mental well-being. These bulletins present headline findings from surveys of school leaders and staff about the implementation of this aspect in their settings.

In June 2017, Estyn published [A review of healthy relationships education](#). The report evaluated the quality of provision for healthy relationships education and identified strategies to support schools to improve its provision and outcomes for pupils. Importantly, the report noted that, successful relationships demand competent interpersonal skills, a willingness to value others and respect difference. Good relationships are the result of care and support, communication and the willingness to accept responsibility. Pupils need to be able to make and maintain friendships, deal with conflict, challenge stereotyping and prejudice, and cope with peer and other influences.

Estyn has published several other thematic reports on similar themes in recent years. We asked leaders to what extent schools and PRUs had considered the key findings in these reports when planning their relationships and sexuality curriculum. In general, we found that education providers had taken account of the main messages and advice from these reports.

[We don't tell our teachers – Experiences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary pupils in Wales](#) (December 2021)

This report considered the incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment in the lives of secondary-aged young people. It reviewed the culture and processes that help protect and

support young people in secondary schools in Wales. The report highlighted both effective practice and shortcomings in how schools respond to and mitigate against negative behaviours between pupils. The report was particularly important to schools as they prepared to deliver RSE.

[Celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion](#) Good practice in supporting LGBT pupils in schools and colleges (October 2020 and amended June 2025). This report recommended that schools and colleges review the curriculum and individual course content to consider how well the teaching of diversity and inclusion, including LGBT issues, is integrated into learning experiences. It also included a clear recommendation for local authorities and consortia to deliver relevant professional learning opportunities for staff and to work with primary and secondary schools to ensure progression in relationships and sexuality education.

[Healthy and happy – school impact on pupils’ health and well-being](#) (June 2019)

This report found that involving pupils meaningfully in the evaluation and development of a school’s work to support their health and wellbeing was a key factor for success. Pupils’ sense of belonging and value is often linked to the extent they feel that staff care about them, take time to get to know them and listen to their views. The main recommendation to schools was to develop a coherent whole-school approach to supporting all pupils’ health and well-being. The key recommendation to local authorities was to support schools in developing this approach.

Recommendations

Schools and PRUs should:

- R1 Strengthen curriculum planning to secure coherent and developmentally appropriate progression in relationships and sexuality education (RSE) from ages 3 to 16
- R2 Improve the quality and consistency of RSE teaching through targeted, subject-specific professional learning that builds practitioners' confidence and pedagogical expertise

Local authorities, school improvement services and Dysgu should:

- R3 Ensure consistent access to specialist support and high-quality professional learning related to pedagogy for RSE for all schools and PRUs
- R4 Facilitate effective collaboration between primary and secondary schools to support coherent and developmentally appropriate progression in RSE

Welsh Government should:

- R5 Strengthen national guidance to support progression and the evaluation of impact in RSE
- R6 Ensure sustainable funding to support professional learning, leadership capacity and partnership working

Strategic leadership and planning for relationships and sexuality education

A whole-school approach to mental and emotional health

A key consideration for this thematic review was the quality and effectiveness of strategic leadership for relationships and sexuality education across providers. To evaluate this, it was imperative to consider providers' whole-school approach to mental and emotional well-being. We considered how well leaders articulated a clear vision for promoting positive mental and emotional well-being, supported curriculum development and positive learning experiences, and ensured that their schools and PRUs provided safety and emotional security for their pupils. While the quality of provision varied, there were clear patterns of a strong system-wide moral commitment to supporting and promoting pupil well-being and healthy relationships. In many schools, this commitment was embedded within a broader ethos that prioritised respect, equity and belonging. Although strategic leadership of RSE remained at an emerging stage of development in a few cases, inspectors noted established and strong pastoral systems as a common feature across nearly all providers. Responding to safeguarding concerns, including taking swift action to respond to emerging or potential welfare issues, was a common and notable strength in many schools and PRUs.

Vision and ethos

In almost all schools and PRUs visited, leaders placed well-being at the centre of their strategic vision. Leaders frequently articulated values-based approaches rooted in mutual respect, kindness, and positive relationships. These principles were reflected in school policies, behaviour systems, signage around school buildings and daily interactions such as assemblies and form time activities. RSE was not treated as an isolated area of learning but was positioned within wider work to promote emotional resilience, safeguarding and inclusion.

In nearly all providers, pupils reported that they felt safe and knew how to seek support if needed. They described trusting relationships with staff. They felt confident that concerns would be addressed appropriately. Leaders, particularly in primary schools, had successfully cultivated cultures in which pupils understood the importance of kindness, empathy, and respectful communication. However, while this strong ethos provided a positive foundation, it did not always ensure clarity of curriculum aims. In a few cases, leaders relied on broad statements about well-being without being able to define precisely

what pupils should know, understand and be able to do at different stages of their education.

Across many providers, leaders had developed robust pastoral and safeguarding systems that supported the delivery of RSE. Multi-agency partnerships were common and often highly effective. Schools worked closely with health professionals, police liaison officers and specialist third-sector organisations to respond to contextual risks and emerging concerns. In many schools, leaders adopted trauma-informed or nurturing approaches. They implemented effective systems to identify vulnerable pupils and respond promptly to issues such as harmful sexual behaviours, online exploitation, or unhealthy peer relationships. These systems ensured that provision was responsive to pupils' lived experiences. Nevertheless, this responsiveness was often reactive rather than strategic. While leaders addressed immediate concerns effectively, they did not always embed these responses within a long-term curriculum framework to secure progression and coherence.

Use of evidence and intelligence

Many leaders used a broad range of evidence to inform planning. This included national and school-specific well-being data provided through the bi-annual [School Health Research Network](#) (SHRN) survey and other approved surveys. Providers also used safeguarding records, pupil voice activities and informal feedback from parents and community partners to inform their planning. In the most effective cases, leaders triangulated these sources of information to identify emerging themes and adjust provision accordingly. In the stronger examples, pastoral intelligence informed curriculum content regularly. Leaders drew on safeguarding trends and community intelligence to adapt themes and address relevant issues. For example, where leaders identified concerns about online misogyny or substance misuse, they incorporated appropriate learning experiences into planned provision. This evidence-informed approach enabled schools to respond promptly to issues such as digital harms, unhealthy relationship norms and misinformation. Leaders demonstrated growing awareness of the complexity of pupils' social contexts and the need to equip them with critical thinking skills.

Swift and effective response to misogynistic behaviour

Leaders in one secondary school demonstrated timely responsiveness to a potentially harmful emerging issue that was affecting the well-being of pupils. Following reports of misogynistic language being used by a small group of male pupils, staff planned and delivered a focused workshop for all male pupils across the school, in separate year group sessions. Following this, staff reinforced expectations and promoted the values of respect and equity through assemblies and tutor group activities for all pupils over an agreed period of time. They evaluated the impact of this work on pupils' attitudes and

behaviours through questionnaires and discussions in focus groups after some time had elapsed.

In most cases, evaluation processes focused on checking curriculum content rather than considering outcomes for pupils. Leaders commonly monitored coverage of topics, participation rates, and safeguarding incidents. Only a few providers systematically evaluated the impact of RSE on pupils' knowledge, attitudes, or decision-making. This meant that leaders were not always able to demonstrate how well provision improved pupils' understanding and development over time.

Pupil voice and participation

In most schools, leaders had established meaningful methods to capture pupil views. These included discussions in school councils, ambassador groups, focus groups and social action initiatives such as anti-bullying week activities. Pupils often contributed to identifying priority topics and shaping aspects of provision. In the stronger examples, pupil voice influenced both curriculum content and wider cultural developments. For example, pupils had contributed well to anti-bullying campaigns, equality initiatives and awareness-raising activities. This enhanced pupils' sense of purpose and belonging.

However, the quality of engagement with pupils to gather their views varied. In a minority of providers, consultation was episodic and focused primarily on gathering opinions rather than co-constructing learning. In these instances, leaders did not always ensure that pupil voice informed long-term strategic planning.

Greenhill School: Continued influence of pupil voice to adapt the RSE curriculum

Leaders at Greenhill school have created effective systems that combine robust data analysis, pupil voice and responsive pastoral care to inform curriculum development and identify priorities. They provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to influence decision-making through the Senedd sub-groups, youth groups and pupil-led forums such as the Social Action Team. This ensures that emerging challenges, concerns and ideas are communicated directly to senior leadership on a regular basis.

Leaders listen carefully to pupils' views and act upon them, resulting in a strong sense of ownership and engagement among pupils. This helps foster a respectful and inclusive school culture. Groups of pupils collaborate with youth workers, pastoral staff and leaders to analyse and interpret findings from the [SHRN](#) data which ensures a shared understanding of emerging learning needs. As a result, leaders adapt curriculum content and interventions and provide meaningful learning sessions on themes such as

the influence of social media, artificial intelligence, how algorithms are used in social media, and misogynistic online content.

This effective practice demonstrates leaders' awareness of the changing risks facing young people and their commitment to progressive, responsive and relevant learning opportunities.

Inclusion within the school culture

Across many providers, leaders fostered inclusive environments in which diversity was recognised and respected. Schools promoted equality, anti-racism, and LGBTQ+ inclusion well through assemblies, curriculum themes, and awareness events. In these providers, pupils spoke positively about feeling valued and represented.

Leaders' commitment to inclusion contributed notably to their school's ethos and climate. In several schools, displays, language and policy documentation reflected inclusive values. Pupils from an early age demonstrated respectful attitudes towards difference and were increasingly confident in discussing identity and rights as they grew older. Despite these strengths, inclusion within the taught RSE curriculum was not always planned systematically. In some cases, coverage of topics relating to sex, gender identity, sexuality and cultural diversity depended heavily on the confidence of individual staff to do so. This aspect is discussed further in the section on professional learning and support.

Curriculum coherence and progression

While many leaders had begun mapping RSE provision across the curriculum, fewer had secured a fully coherent whole-school approach. In several schools, mapping exercises were descriptive rather than evaluative. Leaders identified where topics were delivered but did not always consider depth, sequencing, or progression.

Across a majority of providers, leaders were not able to explain clearly how learning in RSE was built over time. Although pupils encountered relevant themes at different points, leaders were often unable to demonstrate how concepts were revisited and deepened. The development of increasingly sophisticated understanding, particularly in relation to consent, abuse of power in relationships and responsible digital citizenship, was not planned consistently.

Progression between primary and secondary phases was underdeveloped. In many clusters, collaboration between these sectors was limited. Leaders did not routinely share curriculum frameworks or agree common expectations with partner schools. This led to duplication in some areas and gaps in others and did not always secure smooth and

cumulative 3–16 progression. However, in many of the all-age schools visited, this aspect was a particular strength. Leaders had considered phase-specific learning and progression carefully. This was evident in the learning experiences observed during our visits.

Ysgol Caer Elen – Phase-specific discussions on rights, equity and inclusion in an all-age school

Ysgol Caer Elen’s motto, ‘Daw’r dderwen o’r fesen fach’ (the oak tree grows from the small acorn) is clearly evident through the school’s strong and effective curriculum planning. Leaders and staff have collaborated effectively to ensure they fully understand the RSE Code and what is required and suitable for all developmental stages. As a result, they provide progressive, cumulative and purposeful RSE learning experiences for all pupils across the age range.

Weekly assemblies and daily tutor time activities are underpinned by the school’s four core values of fairness, kindness, support and perseverance.

Learning sessions observed across the school were relevant, engaging and productive. Teachers provided pupils with the necessary terminology, information and scenarios to enable them to discuss equity, children’s rights, negative attitudes and harmful influences knowledgeably. Pupils in these sessions (Years 2 and 3, Year 6 and Year 11) demonstrated remarkable maturity and sensitivity relevant to their age and developmental stage. Their strong and sustained engagement in discussions led to substantial progress in RSE learning. This was a notable feature.

Staff confidence

Across many providers, leaders acknowledged variability in staff confidence in delivering RSE. Although staff demonstrated strong commitment to supporting pupils’ well-being, they did not always feel equipped to address sensitive or complex topics. In particular, areas such as LGBTQ+ inclusion, harmful gender stereotypes or norms, sex education and emerging online risks presented challenges. Professional learning was not aligned consistently with identified needs. In several schools, training focused primarily on safeguarding compliance rather than deepening subject knowledge or pedagogical expertise. This led to inconsistency in classroom delivery. Where leaders invested strategically in professional learning on pedagogy, staff demonstrated greater confidence and consistency. In these cases, leaders linked training to curriculum planning and created regular, valuable opportunities for reflection and collaboration.

Parental and community engagement

Most schools communicated with parents about RSE provision through newsletters, policy documents, or information evenings. However, engagement was often informational rather than collaborative. Leaders provided updates on content but did not routinely involve parents in shaping the curriculum. In a few cases, leaders had engaged with parents proactively, addressing misconceptions and fostering a shared understanding. These approaches helped to build trust and reduce potential tensions. Where engagement was limited or reactive, leaders missed opportunities to strengthen partnerships and reinforce consistent messages between school and home.

Fitzalan High School – Effective consultation with parents and carers during the design stage for RSE

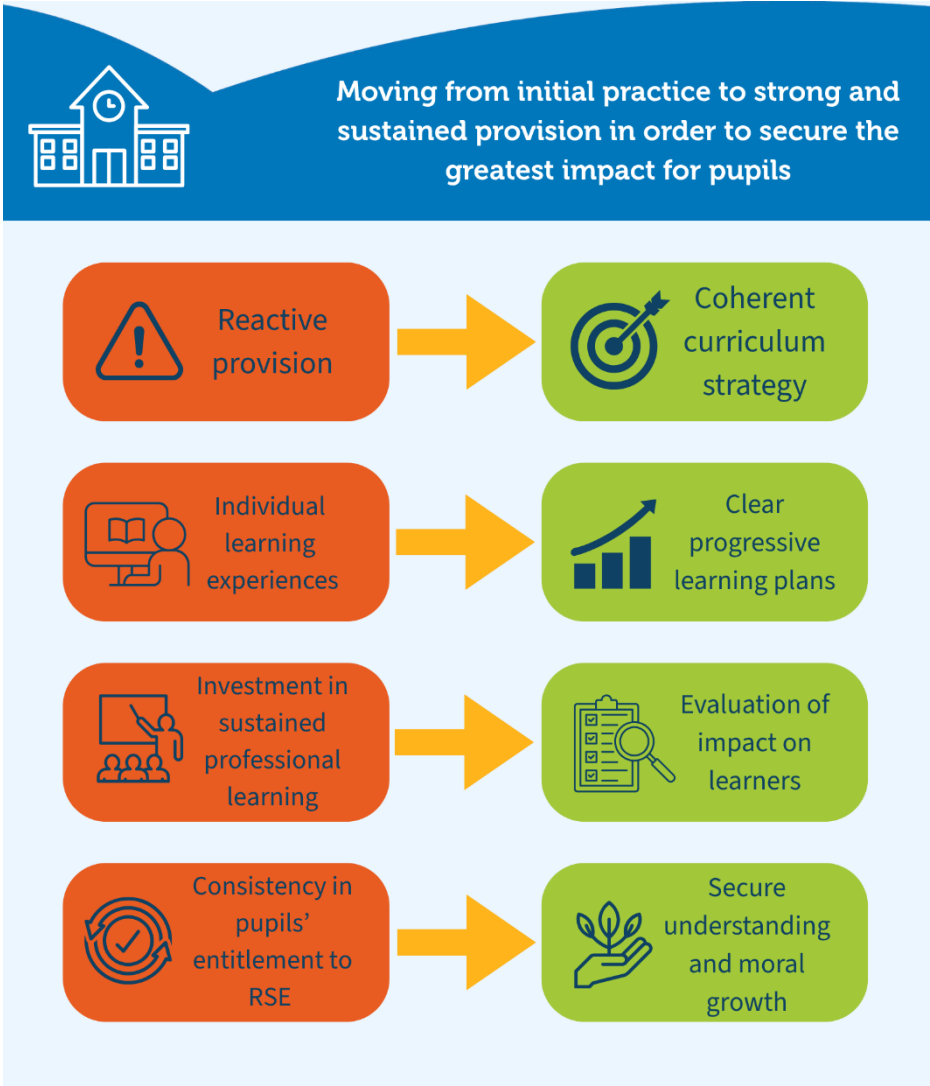
During the planning stage for the delivery of the new RSE Code, leaders engaged proactively with the wider school community. This included parents, religious representatives, including those from mosques and synagogues and other community leaders and representatives. The school shared details of the RSE Code requirements with these interested parties and explained the developmental phases clearly. Leaders responded swiftly and effectively when misinformation spread through the community. The school organised translations of curriculum materials into community languages and held drop-in meetings to secure trust and transparency with stakeholders. Collaboration with partner primaries and the co-construction of a progressive RSE curriculum from nursery to sixth form were notable features.

Responding to emerging societal challenges

Leaders recognised the rapidly changing social landscape in which children were growing up. Issues such as online misogyny, negative social media influence, images created using artificial intelligence and harmful extremist political content were increasingly prominent. In many schools, leaders responded to specific incidents or concerns by adapting tutor time plans, preparing bespoke assemblies, or inviting external speakers to present on pertinent themes.

Most providers were drawing effectively on external expertise to deliver sensitive or specialist content. This was for two reasons: to supplement staff expertise or lack of confidence and to provide pupils with enhanced opportunities to engage with authentic learning experiences and to receive current guidance and support. However, reliance on external partners sometimes resulted in fragmented provision, particularly when this was not integrated into a coherent curriculum plan. Overall, responses to emerging challenges were often reactive. Leaders had not embedded anticipatory themes or a future-focused curriculum systematically.

In conclusion, the next phase of improvement requires leaders to move from pastoral provision which is reactive to a more coherent curriculum strategy. This includes articulating clear learning intentions and strengthening progression across phases. It also entails leaders investing in sustained professional learning and evaluating its impact more rigorously by considering the effect of learning on pupils' emotional and social growth. By doing so, leaders will be better placed to secure consistent entitlement to RSE for pupils and ensure that this makes a demonstrable difference to pupils' understanding and moral growth.



The quality and impact of training and support for practitioners

This thematic review considered the extent and availability of professional learning and training for staff to support the delivery of RSE. In most schools and PRUs we visited, leaders had prioritised professional learning appropriately and had taken suitable steps to support staff in delivering RSE within a whole-school approach to well-being. However, there was considerable variability across Wales in terms of access to specialist training, with geographical differences clearly evident. In addition, there were clear inconsistencies in local authority leadership and support, as well as in the support offered by specialist partners. These shortcomings had impacted negatively on staff confidence in tackling specific aspects of the RSE curriculum and in their approach to planning cumulative learning experiences over time.

A strong commitment to staff professional development

Across most schools and PRUs, staff had accessed a suitable and often wide-ranging programme of professional learning to support the planning and delivery of RSE. However, there was limited support for developing purposeful pedagogy to deliver lessons around sensitive topics. Training typically included trauma-informed practice, safeguarding and welfare matters, support for mental health and emotional development, and curriculum planning. In many cases, this professional learning underpinned a broader relational and preventative approach to RSE, rather than focusing narrowly on specific content coverage.

In most providers, designated leaders and key staff had undertaken targeted professional learning. This had strengthened their confidence in delivering sensitive topics and deepened their understanding of statutory requirements. It also supported the development of coherent whole-school approaches to mental and emotional health and well-being. In schools and PRUs with particularly effective practice, leaders had ensured that those who attended external courses disseminated their learning to all staff through meetings and internal training sessions. As a result, expertise had been shared beyond individual practitioners and embedded more widely across the school.

Georgetown Primary School– A strong professional learning culture where staff share their learning to increase expertise in RSE across the school

Leaders ensure that staff have access to a wide range of training programmes to support pupils' well-being and development. This includes training in trauma-informed approaches, use of an approved sexual behaviour traffic light tool and LGBTQ+ matters.

Trained staff have beneficial opportunities to share and disseminate their learning and resources to support the delivery of RSE. This has helped increase staff confidence and their ability to deliver sessions on sensitive topics. In a wider context, this supports the school's priorities around distributed leadership and shared ownership of curriculum design.

Strong use of external partnerships was a notable feature in the majority of schools. Leaders worked productively with a range of agencies and professionals, including school nurses, school police officers, health professionals, charities, and third-sector organisations. These partnerships enhanced staff knowledge and supported the delivery of sensitive curriculum content, particularly in areas such as personal safety, relationships, and sexual health. In many instances, external contributors also supported staff development and well-being, which contributed to a more confident and informed workforce. All schools and PRUs spoke particularly positively about the support they continued to receive from their school police officer. Although this national service is no longer funded by Welsh Government, many police forces across Wales have continued to provide schools and PRUs with a named police officer to deliver learning sessions and provide support to staff and pupils when responding to community or peer issues.

Many schools benefited from positive local authority and cluster support. Regional collaboration and support for curriculum development either ceased or was reduced when national arrangements through regional consortia came to an end in March 2025. However, most local authorities across Wales provide some degree of support through named officers responsible for this area of the curriculum. Leaders and staff told us that regular or half-termly network meetings for those responsible for pastoral care, the health and well-being AoLE and well-being more generally, provided valuable opportunities for professional dialogue and sharing good practice. In addition, support from school improvement advisors or partners had helped them interpret the RSE Code and statutory guidance and refine curriculum plans since 2022. Moreover, leaders reported that cluster collaboration was particularly beneficial in building a shared understanding of progression and expectations. Notably, where external support was limited, particularly in some areas of Wales, cluster working had enabled schools to draw on peer expertise and develop internal capacity.

In the majority of schools and PRUs, there were strong features in internal leadership as leaders had taken a proactive approach to auditing provision, identifying professional learning needs, and aligning training to emerging issues. In the few best examples, schools had developed their own professional learning programmes and shared internal expertise effectively. This had contributed to stronger staff confidence and more coherent RSE

delivery over time. More broadly, professional learning linked to emotional well-being, understanding behaviour, inclusion and safeguarding had supported the relational foundation necessary for effective RSE. Importantly, this reinforced a whole-school approach to positive mental and emotional health and well-being.

Ysgol Pontyberem - Investment in staff professional development to provide universal support for well-being and support delivery of RSE

The school's approach to promoting well-being is a central strategic priority. Leaders recognise, through self-evaluation processes and well-being data, that issues such as anxiety, trauma-related behaviours and emotional dysregulation are affecting pupils' readiness to learn. In response, they have deliberately repositioned emotional well-being as being central to all the school's work. They have established the need to upskill all staff to meet pupils' emotional needs within the classroom as opposed to through isolated provision or small group interventions.

There is considerable investment in staff development around trauma, mental and emotional health, violence against women, domestic abuse and sexual violence, positive behaviour management and de-escalation techniques. This breadth of training supports consistency in approach by staff and builds internal capacity as demand for specialist and external services increases. In addition, the school's collaboration with external partners is extensive and ensures ongoing guidance and support for staff when required.

Although fewer in number, areas for development were consistent across a minority of providers. A key concern was the limited access to specialist RSE training. While most schools had accessed broad professional learning in well-being matters, subject-specific pedagogy was less well developed. In particular, staff reported gaps in professional learning related to sexuality education, LGBTQ+ inclusion, addressing misogyny and harmful gender attitudes, and supporting gender-diverse pupils. This meant that provision in these areas was less assured and less evident.

There was also variability in the quality and consistency of local authority support. While some schools had benefited from strong strategic guidance and accessible training programmes, others reported limited bespoke or specialist support. In a few cases, opportunities for networking were restricted. Leaders and staff had limited opportunities to meet, and communication was normally shared through termly e-mails to schools and PRUs from local authority officers. Consequently, these schools relied on internal expertise and collaboration to plan learning experiences. Some sought a degree of cluster support

or had sourced provision independently to meet their needs. This has led to unequal experiences for pupils across local areas.

Even in schools who reported having had generally positive access to professional learning, staff confidence remained variable. In particular, practitioners were less confident in approaching certain aspects of RSE. This was notably evident in areas such as sexual health education, addressing sensitive or emerging issues, and using accurate and appropriate terminology. Where professional learning was not embedded within a rolling programme, newer staff were often less well trained and prepared. In a few schools, this inconsistency led to cautious, uneven, or limited delivery of key curriculum themes, particularly in the secondary phase and for older pupils.

Senior leaders reported that time, funding, and capacity constraints presented substantial and ongoing challenges. They reported frequently that not all staff could access training due to competing priorities. In many schools, leaders with responsibility for RSE held wider responsibilities and lacked protected time to develop their roles fully. Financial pressures limited the extent to which schools could engage with external expertise, and demand for specialist agencies often exceeded availability. In many cases, these factors had constrained the pace and breadth of professional learning over time.

In many schools, there was an over-reliance on external delivery of key curriculum content such as provision for periods and sex education by the school nurse to Year 6 pupils in Phase 5. While these external contributors added valuable expertise, in a minority of cases they delivered key elements of the RSE curriculum as one-off sessions. This limited opportunities for school staff to build their own expertise and integrate learning sensitively through schemes of work.

Ultimately, over-dependence on external partners is risky, particularly as these services have decreased in recent years or are not widely available across Wales. Indeed, reliance on external provision in some schools and PRUs had reduced sustainability further. Inspectors saw that where internal capacity was not developed alongside external contributions, schools were less well placed to adapt provision in response to changing pupil needs.

Ongoing challenges

In the schools and PRUs visited, we identified that leaders continued to face broader contextual challenges. Financial constraints and staffing pressures affected the availability and continuity of professional learning. Leaders also reported difficulties in keeping pace with emerging societal issues and ensuring that staff remained confident in addressing new themes sensitively and accurately.

Overall, most schools demonstrated a clear commitment to strengthening professional learning for RSE and were willing to work creatively to overcome barriers. Where leaders adopted a strategic, whole-school approach, aligned training to pupil need and building internal capacity alongside external partnerships, professional learning was more coherent and sustainable. However, in order to secure greater consistency of quality and coverage, schools require improved access to specialist training, clearer strategic support in some local authorities, and sufficient time and resources to embed high-quality practice across all aspects of the RSE curriculum.

Teaching and learning in the classroom and beyond

Overall, the evidence presented a generally positive picture of how provision supported pupils' personal development, promoted positive relationships, and contributed to a positive whole-school culture centred around developing mental and emotional well-being. In most schools, strengths clearly outweighed areas for development. Provision was generally well-established or developing securely. Leaders had taken purposeful steps to embed RSE within the wider ethos and culture of their schools. This meant that, in the sessions we observed, most pupils benefited from learning experiences that were relevant, age-appropriate and aligned with their developmental needs.

Overall effectiveness of provision

Across many schools and PRUs, RSE provision was either securely established or improving steadily. Leaders demonstrated a clear commitment to supporting pupils' personal development and well-being. In these cases, RSE was not treated as a discrete, isolated subject but was increasingly integrated into the broader curriculum and pastoral framework.

Most schools provided learning that was appropriate to pupils' age and stage of development and aligned securely with the developmental phases described in the RSE guidance. Curriculum content, particularly in the primary and all-age sectors, typically reflected a progressive model. This enabled pupils to build knowledge, skills and understanding over time. Early learning often focused on love, kindness, friendship, and respect. As pupils matured, themes became more complex and included equality, consent, online safety and understanding healthy and unhealthy relationships.

In the strongest examples, RSE provision was coherent and aligned closely with schools' values and wider well-being strategies. This coherence supported pupils to make connections between what they learned in lessons and the expectations and values promoted throughout the school day and in well-being activities.

Ysgol Bro Pedr: Santes Dwynwen assembly

Ysgol Bro Pedr places substantial responsibility on pupils to plan and lead school assemblies. There is regular focus on aspects linked to the school's ten core values, such as kindness, honesty, respect, empathy and happiness.

The Pwyllgor Cymreictod (a pupil-led committee which focusses on promoting Welsh culture and language) delivered a well-considered, relevant and powerful presentation to pupils in Years 7-9 as part of the school's Dydd Santes Dwynwen celebrations. Pupils explored how to show and demonstrate love, kindness and tolerance. In contrast, they also explored strong messages about what love doesn't represent by including themes such as consent, coercion and abuse of power. The pupils sourced messages and quotations from well-known celebrities to highlight key messages. All pupils behaved impeccably during the presentation, responded superbly to the discussion and demonstrated considerable respect towards one another. Discussions with pupils as they left the school hall testified to their secure understanding of the themes explored during the presentation. Pupils referred confidently to learning about these topics in subjects across the curriculum and in weekly discussions in tutor sessions: 'Yr hyn sy'n bwysig' (Important matters).

Curriculum quality and design

In many schools and PRUs visited, there were suitably broad and balanced RSE curricula. In a majority of providers, leaders had mapped learning across year groups to provide a structured pathway. In a few of these schools, there was a more progressive pathway where pupils revisited key themes at increasing levels of sophistication, allowing them to deepen their understanding over time.

Provision often combined discrete RSE lessons with cross-curricular learning. For example, aspects of relationship education were reinforced through Welsh and English literature and in humanities subjects, personal and social education sessions, and assemblies. This blended approach helped to normalise discussion of relationships and well-being, rather than confining learning to isolated sessions. For example, Year 11 pupils told us how they valued opportunities to discuss themes such as racial injustice and moral growth when studying Harper Lee's novel, 'To Kill a Mockingbird' in English lessons. Year 9 pupils were able to exemplify how Nazi propaganda distorted the term 'Aryan' to promote ethnic and cultural superiority and how this led to the growth of homophobia and antisemitism.

In many schools, leaders ensured that RSE was thoughtfully connected to positive behaviour strategies and wider well-being provision. This integration supported the consistency of messaging and reinforced expectations around respectful behaviour and inclusion. Where curriculum planning was strongest, leaders monitored coverage and progression carefully and adapted content in response to emerging needs. However, in a minority of schools, curriculum mapping lacked sufficient clarity. In these instances, progression was less well defined, and the sequencing of learning did not always build

systematically on prior knowledge. In a few secondary settings, the provision for personal and social education and, within this, RSE relied too heavily on a few annual enrichment days or presentations from visiting speakers, rather than forming part of a structured, timetabled programme. This limited continuity and reduced opportunities for sustained reflection. In a very few cases, across sectors, there was over-reliance on using a commercially acquired learning programme to deliver RSE. In these cases, teachers delivered poor quality sessions, confining the teaching and learning to a series of banal worksheets which gave pupils little opportunity for meaningful discussion and development of ideas.

Whole-school culture of healthy relationships

A notable strength across the sample of schools and PRUs was the extent to which schools embedded relationship learning beyond formal lessons. In many schools, expectations around kindness, fairness and respect were evident in daily practice and reinforced through behaviour systems and pastoral care. Effective approaches included regular assemblies focused on key themes, themed activities to raise awareness, restorative or rights-based practices, and the provision of safe or nurture spaces for vulnerable pupils or when pupils required additional support. These approaches contributed to inclusive and supportive environments where pupils felt valued.

In the strongest examples, staff modelled respectful relationships consistently, and pupils demonstrated a clear understanding of behavioural expectations. This whole-school emphasis on healthy relationships strengthened safeguarding arrangements and supported pupils' sense of belonging. In the providers where staff promoted consistent messages about respect and inclusion, pupils generally understood the importance of treating others fairly and recognised the link between relationships and well-being.

St Christopher's Special School: Age-appropriate and stage-appropriate RSE in a special school context

St Christopher's Special School demonstrates a strong understanding of the importance of delivering relationships and sexuality education that is appropriate to pupils' developmental stage rather than their chronological age. Leaders and staff recognise that many pupils may appear physically mature but have substantially lower levels of cognitive, emotional and social understanding. As a result, RSE provision is carefully adapted to meet individual needs and levels of readiness. Teaching focuses explicitly on helping pupils understand emotions, boundaries and consent in practical and accessible ways. Staff support pupils to recognise facial expressions, body language and different forms of "no", and to understand how these cues apply in real-life

situations.

This approach is particularly important for pupils who find social interaction challenging and may default to adults rather than peers for reassurance or support. Across the school, RSE is framed around safety, belonging and well-being, ensuring pupils build confidence and understanding gradually. This stage-not-age approach supports pupils to develop the skills and awareness they need to form safe and respectful relationships, aligned closely with the expectations of the RSE code in a special school context

Pupil attitudes and outcomes

Across nearly all schools and PRUs, pupils engaged positively with RSE learning. They demonstrated empathy, respect, and a keenness to discuss issues relating to relationships. Younger pupils in the primary phases typically articulated clear understanding of kindness, fairness and friendship. In sessions, they talked freely and confidently about those around them who cared for them and loved them and had a solid and secure understanding of the qualities of a good friend. They knew how to seek help and could identify trusted adults within the school. Older pupils often displayed mature understanding of more complex themes. Many were able to distinguish between healthy and unhealthy relationships, recognise the influence of peer pressure and discuss issues relating to equality and discrimination.

Pupils across the age range also showed increasing awareness of online risks and a secure understanding of responsible digital behaviour. In all providers visited, pupils reported feeling safe and supported by staff. They understood how to access help and were confident that concerns would be taken seriously. This reflected the effective integration of RSE within broader safeguarding provision. Where outcomes were strongest, pupils were not only knowledgeable but also reflective. They considered different perspectives and demonstrated growing critical awareness of social influences. However, in a minority of schools, opportunities for deeper critical thinking were more limited. Although topics were revisited, they were not always explored in sufficient depth to help young adults challenge stereotypes or develop more advanced reflection.

Teaching approaches and delivery

In most cases, provision was developmentally appropriate to pupils' age and cognitive ability and sensitive to pupils' needs. Lessons were often discussion-based and encouraged reflection. Staff used scenarios, role-play, and literature effectively to explore complex issues in accessible ways. Teachers commonly established safe learning

environments where pupils felt comfortable discussing sensitive topics. Ground rules were clear, and staff responded to questions with care and professionalism.

Ysgol Mynydd Bychan: Building foundations for healthy relationships in the early years

Ysgol Mynydd Bychan primary school places strong emphasis on establishing the foundations of healthy relationships from the earliest stages of learning. The early years curriculum is carefully structured to develop emotional literacy, a strong sense of belonging and secure, trusting relationships through age-appropriate and experiential learning experiences.

In the early years, pupils learn to identify and name feelings, understand kindness, and recognise who helps them and keeps them safe. A particularly effective feature is the use of family photographs brought in from home. These are used to support discussion about who is important to each child and to reinforce that families can look different. This simple but meaningful practice strengthens pupils' sense of belonging and explains diverse family structures in a developmentally appropriate way.

Adults model respectful language and consistently reinforce expectations around "kind hands" and "kind words", supporting pupils to internalise relational norms from a young age. The school's trauma-informed relational approach underpins this work. Daily routines such as meet-and-greet at the classroom door and predictable transitions help children feel safe and secure.

Experiential learning further strengthens understanding. Role-play areas (such as learning how to wash hair), collaborative block play, cooking activities (emphasising hygiene and cooperation), and outdoor learning provide authentic opportunities to practise sharing, negotiating and resolving minor conflicts. The careful use of inclusive texts ensures that children encounter diversity in families and identities as part of everyday learning. As a result, pupils in the early years demonstrate growing empathy, confidence in expressing their feelings and increasing independence in managing social situations. This strong relational foundation prepares them well for the more complex aspects of relationships and RSE taught in later years.

While most schools demonstrated secure provision overall, a few showed variabilities in delivery. In these contexts, the quality of teaching depended too heavily on individual staff expertise. Reliance on occasional themed events, rather than sustained curriculum planning, limited consistency. In contrast, schools with well-established systems ensured that RSE was embedded across subjects and year groups. Leaders monitored

implementation and supported staff through professional learning. This approach reduced variability and strengthened coherence.

Nevertheless, variability in staff confidence remained the most consistent area for improvement in the providers visited. In particular, staff were less confident when teaching more complex or sensitive themes, such as sexuality, gender identity, misogyny, and harmful gender norms. In these cases, delivery relied heavily on structured schemes of work. While such schemes provided helpful guidance, over-reliance sometimes limited the depth of discussion and reduced opportunities to respond flexibly to pupils' questions. On a few occasions, teachers provided audio-visual presentations or short films with little ensuing opportunity for discussion and exploration of ideas. Where staff confidence was stronger, teachers adapted materials thoughtfully and facilitated open, balanced discussion. Where confidence was less secure, learning was sometimes simplified, and opportunities to explore nuanced issues were constrained.

Inclusion and representation

Many schools made positive and well-considered efforts to promote equality and inclusion. Pupils from an early age learned about fairness, diversity, and the importance of respecting difference. However, the depth and consistency of coverage of these aspects varied. In some schools, LGBTQ+ themes, gender, and wider identity topics were not addressed consistently across year groups. In a few cases, coverage was limited or lacked sufficient depth to develop meaningful understanding. This inconsistency reduced the coherence of progression and, at times, risked leaving gaps in pupils' learning.

Where practice was strongest, inclusive themes were embedded authentically within the curriculum rather than presented as isolated topics. Leaders ensured that resources reflected diverse experiences and that pupils encountered positive representation across learning contexts.

Ysgol Caer Elen: Invitation to a party

Pupils in Year 2 were presented with a written invitation to an imaginary party to celebrate Dydd Santes Dwynwen. As well as taking place on the first floor of a building with no lift, the criteria to be met to attend the party raised questions around fairness, diversity and inclusivity. Six-year-old children engaged in small group discussions and demonstrated a secure understanding of fairness and equality appropriate for their developmental stage. Themes included same sex and single parent families, religious needs and beliefs, social exclusion, attitudes towards physical disability, diversity and

poverty. These pupils then moved on to writing and creative activities which consolidated their learning.

Encouraging discussion and expression from an early age

Primary schools, in particular, ensured inclusion and representation in the classroom. In most sessions for the youngest pupils, teachers began the day by checking in with pupils' emotional and personal well-being. They typically did this in a variety of ways, with pupils being given beneficial opportunities to express their thoughts and feelings as well as share details of what they had for breakfast or what they had done the previous evening. Many teachers conducted such sessions with particular success, using a range of resources such as face cards with different expressions for children to choose, different coloured cushion characters which represented a broad range of feelings for them to cuddle and simple whole-class games where they could demonstrate their current mood. It was evident that younger pupils enjoyed these emotional check-ins and benefitted from opportunities to express their worries or contentment.

Many schools and PRUs in the secondary phase provided valuable opportunities for group discussion in RSE sessions. In the best examples, teachers worked hard to enable supportive and engaging climates in their sessions which encouraged pupils to feel safe to express their viewpoints. Older pupils in many schools articulated explicitly their preference for meaningful, comprehensive, and adult-managed discussion about important and relevant societal issues over structured learning tasks in RSE or PSE lessons. Pupils stated that it was through such learning experiences that they were more likely to develop secure fundamental knowledge of important topics and social understanding. In many cases, pupils' engagement in discussion about RSE with inspectors was excellent and the level of maturity they demonstrated was exceptional.

Challenges

Inspectors note that future improvement hinges on deepening the quality of learning experiences rather than expanding provision. Priorities should include:

- strengthening staff confidence in addressing complex and sensitive topics,
- ensuring progression in learning, and
- embedding inclusive themes more systematically in other AoLE.
- refining the strategic use of pupil voice and ensure a consistent approach to encouraging them to speak out.
- consolidating existing strengths and addressing identified areas for improvement

Appendix 1: Examples of phase-specific learning experiences for pupils between the ages of 3-16

Phase 1: from age 3

The learning sessions described below were observed in the following schools:

- Crickhowell C.P. School
- Georgetown Primary School
- St Christopher's Special School
- Ysgol Bro Pedr
- Ysgol Mynydd Bychan
- Ysgol Pontyberem
- Ysgol Santes Dwynwen
- Ysgol Waunfawr

Creating Santes Dwynwen Cards to give to people whom pupils love and care about

Following on from class and group discussions on what loving and caring for someone looks like, different ways we demonstrate love and care and how this makes us feel, four-year-olds create individual Santes Dwynwen cards to give to people they recognise as loving and caring.

Learning about the diversity of families

Reception and Year 1 pupils group together different cut out cards which represent male, female and non-binary people of all ages and a range of animals to show the diverse nature of families and households. They then write short descriptive pieces about these, which supports the normalisation of different domestic circumstances.

Positive exploitation of Children's Rights

Following a whole-school assembly and presentation on the [United Nations' Convention on the Rights of the Child](#) and the work of the [Children's Commissioner in Wales](#), Year 2 pupils are presented with a series of picture scenarios. They are asked questions around safety, fairness and harm and given a vocabulary list to support them to verbalise their answers. They use their knowledge and understanding of children's rights productively to discuss the prevalence of justice and equity in the pictures. Themes include disability, anger and hatred, mild physical harm, danger and bullying.

Discussions on consent

After listening to a story about being a good friend, pupils in Years 1 and 2 take part in a circle time activity where they explore consent. The teacher asks valid questions about what represents appropriate touching and behaviour between friends and what does not. They then discuss how to ask permission before doing something. Pupils practise asking questions to a puppet character from the story, respectfully asking permission to touch or hold it in a certain way (such as hold hand, squeeze, hold upside down, tickle, hug). The teacher, and subsequently, individual pupils speak for the puppet character and either give or refuse permission. These very young pupils develop a secure awareness of consent and how to respect others' wishes and feelings.

Exploring trust: making abstract concepts concrete for younger pupils

A Reception class teacher introduces child-friendly and developmentally suitable terminology to exploit the meaning of trust. Pupils engage in physical demonstrations of trust by interlocking arms, holding on to each other for balance support whilst standing on one leg, giving peers a treasured possession to look after and so on. The teacher also shows how trust can grow and diminish by using a balloon as a metaphor, blowing in and releasing air to show how easy it is to lose trust in someone. Pupils engage well in discussions on how they could trust and the role of a trusted adult in school and beyond. Following this, a card sorting activity with inclusive and diverse images helps younger children understand how to access support and explore the dangers of making assumptions about all adults.

Developing an understanding of racism from a young age

Year 3 pupils work in small groups to read a series of statements and decide if they have a racist or negative tone. They then consider scenarios where these statements could have been made and work together to find a solution to resolve the racist behaviour or attitude fairly and successfully. Pupils then choose to create a storyboard, a graphic text or poem to express their thoughts about how harmful words and attitudes can have a negative effect on a person

Identifying, naming and understanding feelings and emotions

Asking young children to identify and name how they are feeling is a common feature in Nursery and Reception classes. Many schools use coloured animal characters or other toys to represent different emotions. Staff encourage pupils to select and show these to help them express their feelings during daily welfare check-ins. Normalising the breadth of different emotions that a person can have is key to fostering a supportive, nurturing and open culture in schools and results in pupils feeling safe and validated when expressing any anxieties.

Exploring healthy relationships in a special school

Staff reinforce pupils' understanding during an interactive school assembly presentation on love, relationships and kindness. The pupils watch a short video exploring different types of relationships, the human ability to love and the fact that love can look different to people. Presenters explore the different types of love, such as family love, parental or carer relationships, friendships, love for pets and extended families. Pupils are encouraged to discuss with their peers what love means to them. Different family and home contexts are then explicitly acknowledged and normalised. Following this, staff explore unhealthy relationships in a developmentally appropriate way with relevant examples. Themes such as bullying and ignoring people and the impact of these behaviours are discussed and a bruised apple activity is used to illustrate the impact of unkind words. The assembly is well-matched to the needs of the pupils and supports pupils to identify safe responses and sources of help. Planned follow-up in lessons subsequently strengthens coherence and reinforces learning.

Phase 2: from age 7

The learning sessions described below were observed in the following schools and PRUs:

- Denbighshire PRU
- Georgetown Primary School
- Pentre'r Graig School
- Tai Education Centre
- Ysgol Mynydd Bychan

Relaxation sessions to support mental and emotional health and build positive relationships

Developing relationships is a fundamental part of the work of a PRU, where a nurturing ethos, consistent and clear expectations, positive reinforcement and reflective practice are key factors to ensure that pupils make progress. In one PRU, the above is reinforced through daily check-ins, circle time, breakfast routines and debriefs to identify worries early and ensure pupils' emotions are regulated and that they are ready to learn. In addition, weekly relaxation sessions help pupils manage stress, build confidence and improve focus. Trained staff guide pupils through structured activities, starting with high-energy exercises and gradually moving to deep relaxation. These activities include movement, games, stretching, positive touch (with permission), breathing exercises, affirmations and guided visualisation. In the session observed, pupils demonstrated excellent manners, robust self-control and considerable respect for their peers. A notable feature is pupils' ability to manage their emotions effectively during relaxation exercises. Quality assurance processes show that staff, pupils and parents agree that

these weekly sessions have helped reduce children’s anxiety, strengthen their emotional regulation and have resulted in a positive sense of self. By embedding relaxation into the session, the programme succeeds in calming children, improving their concentration and listening skills.

Discussing friendship and other core values

Year 4 pupils sit together in a circle, and the teacher leads the discussion on every person’s unique qualities, skills and talents and links these to the provider’s core values. Questions and activities are developmentally appropriate and structured to support social communication, turn-taking and emotional literacy. Relevant and pertinent vocabulary is discussed and exploited, and clear verbal scaffolding is provided for pupils who require support. Pupils demonstrate a secure understanding of the key terms, qualities, skills and talents and are able to discuss which qualities they value in a friend explaining their reasoning. Engagement is good throughout the session, especially the way in which pupils listen to their peers’ views and wait their turn to speak. They respect different viewpoints and respond respectfully when the teacher poses some challenging questions. Pupils demonstrated beneficial self-awareness when selecting qualities for themselves and show considerable maturity.

Talking about the impact of prejudice and discrimination on our feelings

Year 3 and Year 4 pupils work in groups of four to look at a range of picture cards with short narrative descriptions. These cards depict the following scenarios:

- A young boy who has a bone-anchored hearing aid and likes to wear a cap to hide it. He has been told by a teacher to remove his cap.
- Children have been invited to wear a party outfit to school for an end of term celebration. One girl decides to wear a sari and is met by negative looks and comments from peers.
- A popular girl in a class has invited her friends to a ‘pamper party’ at her house where a hairdresser will be styling their hair. One of the friends wears a hijab.
- The school has organised a ‘bring your dads to class day for its pupils. One boy is parented by two mothers.

Pupils initially discuss aspects such as equity, fairness and inclusion. They move on to discuss the impact of people’s actions and words on the feelings and self-worth of others. They finally work out ways together to make things right, suggest solutions and remedy the situation. This is followed by individual work including story writing linked to the scenarios, poster making to celebrate diversity, and composing poetry to highlight the beauty of difference.

Kind and unkind behaviour on social media

The teacher leads a conversation with Year 6 pupils on the typical images pupils see on social media which depict happy and successful people. They discuss idioms such as ‘all that glitters is not gold’ and a ‘wolf in sheep’s clothing’. They then explore the term exploitation and think of ways people can be led to believe things that are untrue and how this is potentially harmful. In small groups, pupils discuss kind and unkind comments that are made via social media accounts and their impact on a person’s mental health and emotions. They then use role-play cards to act out scenes which include references to verbal bullying and showing kindness and empathy. Pupils engage maturely and collaboratively and develop a secure, nuanced understanding of how they can potentially be manipulated and pressurised by peers to join in negative behaviours.

Exploring gender equality and discrimination

Pupils start with a class discussion on gender equality where they debate confidently whether stereotypical male and female jobs are equally valued. They demonstrate secure critical thinking skills and substantial respect for differing viewpoints. They then move on to explore identity, rights and discrimination through historical case studies such as the criminalisation and mistreatment of scientist Alan Turing and the racial prejudice and discrimination shown towards boxer, Cuthbert Taylor. These frank and informative discussions deepen pupils’ understanding of injustice and inequality. Pupils then consider cultural comparisons and work out how to achieve shared values. This learning experience has a considerable impact on pupils’ development of empathy, their ability to challenge stereotypes and articulate complex ideas confidently.

Diverse families

Year 6 pupils discuss a video clip of a family with a trans parent. They talk about similarities and differences to their own families and show a secure understanding and strong belief that all families should be respected. They manifest that differences are important and make the world a more interesting and diverse place. Pupils engage well in mature discussion with their peers and extend their thinking by exploring negative attitudes and how to challenge them. The more able also delve into the culpability of bystanders.

Use of literature and inclusive texts to support RSE

Teachers hold sensitive discussions with Year 6 Pupils about what constitutes healthy and unhealthy relationships and the concept of abusive associations. They read passages from Goodnight Mr Tom and the chapters which depict the mistreatment of Harry by his carers in Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone.

Developing empathy and social responsibility through hospital partnerships

Ysgol Mynydd Bychan primary school has established a meaningful and sustained partnership with the local children's hospital, which strengthens pupils' understanding of empathy, community responsibility and ethical citizenship. The school has embedded the partnership within learning experiences across the curriculum. Pupils create and share resources for children receiving treatment, including recorded stories, digital quizzes and creative materials. This purposeful work helps pupils understand illness, vulnerability and the importance of connection.

The partnership provides authentic contexts for discussing health, well-being and resilience. Pupils explore themes such as kindness, care and support for others in real-life situations. This deepens their understanding of social responsibility beyond abstract discussion. The work links effectively to the school's emphasis on developing ethical, informed citizens and complements learning within the Health and Well-being Area of Learning and Experience. It also reinforces key aspects of RSE, including empathy, respect, and understanding that everyone's experiences and circumstances are different. As a result, pupils speak thoughtfully about helping others and demonstrate genuine pride in contributing to their wider community. The partnership moves learning beyond the classroom and strengthens pupils' moral awareness.

Phase 3: from age 11

The learning sessions described below were observed in the following schools and PRUs:

- Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic School
- Denbighshire PRU
- St Cyres School
- The John Frost School
- Ysgol Caer Elen
- Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr

Development of terminology and oracy to support learning about consent

In a Year 7 health and well-being lesson, the teacher plans carefully to ensure pupils develop their understanding of vocabulary and key terminology so that they can discuss issues around consent in platonic and physical relationships. The teacher ensures all pupils understand terminology such as 'pressure', 'boundaries' and how to apply it in sentences and in the correct context. Pupils engage in structured talking exercises with partners to rehearse and refine their responses. Sentence frames and a word bank ensure that lower ability pupils are able to form coherent verbal answers. For more able pupils, visual stimuli implying scenes of peer pressure and exploitation supports their

thinking skills and helps them infer messages from images. Most pupils make strong progress in their social understanding and in their confidence due to the thoughtful support and challenge afforded to pupils of different abilities.

Exploring attitudes towards same-sex relationships and different religious perspectives

Year 10 pupils explore attitudes towards same-sex relationships, including how perspectives across different religions have evolved over the past 100 years. The teacher knows the subject well, uses accurate terminology fluently and models high expectations of pupils' language and contributions. The teacher provides high-quality, purposeful, resources and contemporary information to enable the pupils to form solid conclusions. This includes recent data from the Office for National Statistics and materials from Stonewall Cymru. This helps ensure that learning is current, factual and rooted in real-world contexts. Pupils respond well, demonstrate positive attitudes towards learning and engage thoughtfully in discussion. They work in pairs or small groups effectively and show confidence in interpreting data relating to same-sex relationships. They have a secure understanding of the difference in religious perspectives and demonstrate emotional maturity when pondering how these may conflict with the emergence of a secular society.

Influence of social media on attitudes and its impact on mental health

In a health and well-being lesson for Year 11 pupils, the teacher asks how images of celebrities presented on social media influence people's minds. Pupils converse maturely about both the positive and negative role social media influencers can play in young people's lives. They discuss how certain sports people have used their celebrity status positively to promote equity, diversity and healthy relationships. These include:

- Professional boxer Lauren Price and her success in advocating female boxing within a highly masculine space
- Rugby referee Nigel Owens and his influence on positive attitudes towards homosexuality in rugby
- Paralympians Aled Davies and Ellie Simmonds and their work to promote equity in sport
- Footballer Marcus Rashford and his influence on policies to mitigate against childhood poverty

Pupils are then shown generic social media images of young people who look on 'top form' both aesthetically and physically. Pupils share their views on how these so-called images of perfection can be potentially harmful to young people as they strive to look as perfect as these examples. Pupils make mature and sensible statements about the dangers of comparison with images on social media and its damaging impact on self-

awareness, self-image and mental health. Pupils then compose messages and original idioms to highlight that personality and positive human characteristics are more valuable than physical appearance.

Use of literary texts to explore RSE

Generally, in secondary schools, learning within the RSE curriculum is planned well due to collaboration across departments to identify relevant opportunities for discussion of key themes. These themes include misogyny, moral dilemmas and harmful stereotyping.

Teachers use characters in novels or plays, relationships and narrative events to explore:

- friendship, loyalty and trust
- power, inequality and discrimination
- identity, belonging and difference
- moral choice, empathy and standing up to injustice

In the best cases, this work is planned carefully by the RSE coordinator and heads of department to ensure age-appropriate coverage and clear alignment with RSE strands. This work helps pupils engage with sensitive concepts indirectly through story and character, which helps them to discuss complex issues safely without feeling judged or exposed. Pupils reference these opportunities positively, noting that they particularly like oracy-based activities and group discussions. These help them understand healthy and unhealthy behaviours through the narrative and characters in literature. This approach reinforces RSE learning beyond PSE/health and well-being lessons, embedding it securely across the wider curriculum.

Stages of pregnancy and healthy development of a baby in a science lesson with elements of RSE

Year 8 pupils learn about the stages of pregnancy and the healthy development of a baby in a developmentally appropriate manner. The teacher delivers the lesson in a sensitive and factual manner with careful consideration of pupils' maturity and emotional readiness. Pupils engage well with purposeful practical resources such as cut and stick matching descriptions and the manipulation of a range of fruit to represent the relative size of the embryo. This helps them to sequence the stages of development accurately. The teachers use photographs of a caesarean section procedure appropriately and sensitively to enhance the learning.

The lesson moves on to a class and then group discussions, with strong participation from pupils. They discuss responsibly the impact of drug and alcohol use on pregnancy

and demonstrate secure understanding of the importance of a healthy diet, the role of supportive relationships in promoting a healthy pregnancy and positive role modelling. Pupils reflect well on their own learning and make personal connections. Attitudes to learning are positive and sustained as they respond maturely to sensitive content.

One-to-one sessions as a structured mechanism for pupil-led RSE

In one PRU, staff provide structured one-to-one sessions for all pupils. These sessions form part of the universal curriculum offer and are delivered by therapy-trained staff using play-based and creative approaches. They provide a safe, predictable space for pupils to explore issues linked to relationships, family life, bereavement, identity and safeguarding in a manner suited to their developmental stage. In addition to this universal entitlement, pupils are able to request additional sessions where needed. This dual approach ensures that support is both proactive and responsive.

Staff describe how pupils use these sessions to discuss sensitive topics in greater depth, particularly where issues arise in real time. Importantly, staff ensure pupils understand the wider support network and do not become reliant on a single adult. This is particularly relevant for pupils with attachment needs. The model strengthens pupils' confidence to discuss complex relationship issues and provides a structured, safeguarding-led mechanism through which RSE can be personalised and adapted to emerging need.

Sex education lesson on sexually transmitted infections (STIs) in a science lesson

In a Year 11 science lesson, teachers use a practical “exchange of liquids” experiment to help pupils understand how infections such as STIs, including HIV, spread. Pupils initially engage in the activity without being told about the RSE focus. They exchange small amounts of liquid using pipettes and observe how quickly contamination spreads through the group.

Following the practical activity, the teacher explicitly links the activity to sexual health and transmission. The teacher captures pupils' attention well. They are motivated and participate fully, developing a clear, visual understanding of how infections spread rapidly and invisibly. This approach allows the teacher to control the level of detail carefully, ensuring the learning is age appropriate and focussed on health, safety and prevention. The lesson combines aspects of both the health and well-being and science and technology AoLEs well, demonstrating purposeful curriculum integration rather than isolated RSE delivery.

Discussing forced marriage

Year 11 pupils discuss on a whole-class level ‘what is marriage?’. They consider the role of intimacy and religion in marriages and discuss emotional, spiritual, legal and social reasons why people marry. They are then shown a clip from the popular American TV series, ‘Married by Mom and Dad’ before splitting into groups for discussions about the idea of an arranged marriage. Pupils are then given information about a young girl whom they have to assume is their daughter to discuss in small groups. They listen to four recordings of men introducing themselves and pupils are asked to make notes in a ‘compatibility grid’ with the aim being to find the most suitable match for their daughter.

Following this, the class is asked to share what they understand about forced marriage. They consider a list of statements and categorize them under arranged or forced marriage. The teacher shares legal information around the Forced Marriage (Civil Protection) Act 2007 and supports pupils’ learning about consent and denial of human rights. Finally, groups are given a range of scenarios and discuss whether the union was as a result of an arranged or forced marriage. Sources of help and further guidance are shared with pupils at the end of the lesson.

Sexual Consent

Year 10 pupils firstly agree ground rules at the start of the lesson to ensure that they felt safe to discuss their thoughts and feelings. The teacher then signposts support within the school if any pupil required this. They then engage in a whole-class discussion to ascertain their understanding of the term ‘consent’. They consider synonyms for consent, examples of when someone might need to ask for consent, context and typical consent behaviour. In groups, they then read different scenarios and consider the legal implications. These include:

- a 15-year-old boy and girl having sex
- a 16-year-old boy having sex with a 14-year-old girl
- a teacher sexually touching a 17-year-old boy, a 16-year-old girl sexually touching a 15-year-old boy
- an 18-year-old boy who is asking his 17-year-old girlfriend for sexual images of herself,
- two 16-year-olds who have sex. One of them is uncomfortable with what is happening but doesn’t say the word ‘no’.
- a friend of the family who is inappropriately touching a 16-year-old boy
- Two adults who are over the age of 18. Both are at a party and have had a few drinks when they both decide to become intimate.

After gaining a clear understanding of the law, groups of pupils are given different scenarios and consider whether consent was given or not. They gain a secure understanding that consent needs to be sought every time for sexual activity and that both partners need to give consent.

There follows a meaningful discussion on the difficulty and challenges in saying 'no' at times. Pupils listen to the song 'Baby, it's cold outside' by Tom Jones and Cerys Matthews and then discuss the lyrics, the controlling nature of the male in the song and the difficulty the female has in saying 'no'. Themes of fear, peer pressure, guilt, power and isolation are exploited by the teacher.

There are follow on sessions on the themes of power and control, domestic abuse and violence, respect in relationships and issues around false allegations.

Methods and evidence base

To inform this report, during the spring term of 2026 inspectors visited a sample of 30 schools across Wales. We visited 14 primary schools, seven secondary schools, five all-age schools, two special schools and two pupil referral units. The schools we visited were selected to ensure that our sample reflected the socio-economic and linguistic diversity of Wales and broadly representative of schools across Wales. This included variation in size, the proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals, language medium and geographical location.

During our school visits we:

- conducted full session observations and learning walks
- observed year and whole-school assemblies, tutor sessions and small group intervention sessions
- interviewed senior and middle leaders (including headteachers, PRU managers, senior and middle leaders with responsibility for the health and well-being AOLE, designated leader for PSE)
- interviewed groups of pupils across the primary and secondary phases (Year 3, Year 6, Year 9 and Year 11)
- reviewed documentation and relevant resources

In addition to our school visits, we also met with a very few training providers and external organisations who offer support to schools and PRUs. We conducted a desktop review to gather relevant documentation and research relevant to the review's focus. This included an analysis of recent publications and resources, including previously published Estyn thematic reports.

Estyn would like to thank all those involved in this thematic review.

Organisation	Sector	Local Authority
Blaenbaglan Primary School	Primary	Neath Port Talbot
Blessed Carlo Acutis Catholic School	All-age	Merthyr Tydfil
Chepstow Comprehensive School	Secondary	Monmouthshire
Coed Eva Primary School federated with Blenheim Road Community School	Primary	Torfaen
Crickhowell CP School	Primary	Powys
Denbighshire Pupil Referral Unit	PRU	Denbighshire

Fitzalan High School	Secondary	Cardiff
Georgetown Junior and Infants School	Primary	Blaenau Gwent
Park Lane Special School	Special	Rhondda Cynon Taf
Pentre'r Graig Primary School	Primary	Swansea
St Brigid's School	All-age	Denbighshire
St Christopher's School	Special	Wrexham
St Cyres Comprehensive School	Secondary	Vale of Glamorgan
St Ethelwold's School	Primary	Flintshire
St Robert's RC Primary School	Primary	Bridgend
Stebonheath School	Primary	Carmarthenshire
Tai Educational Centre	PRU	Rhondda Cynon Taf
The John Frost School	Secondary	Newport
Ysgol T. Gwynn Jones	Primary	Conwy
Ysgol Afon Wen	All-age	Rhondda Cynon Taf
Ysgol Bro Pedr	All-age	Ceredigion
Ysgol Caer Elen	All-age	Pembrokeshire
Ysgol Emrys ap Iwan	Secondary	Conwy
Ysgol Greenhill School	Secondary	Pembrokeshire
Ysgol Gyfun Gŵyr	Secondary	Swansea
Ysgol Gymraeg Aberystwyth	Primary	Ceredigion
Ysgol Gynradd Pontyberem	Primary	Carmarthenshire
Ysgol Mynydd Bychan	Primary	Cardiff
Ysgol Santes Dwynwen	Primary	Ynys Môn
Ysgol Waunfawr	Primary	Gwynedd
Stori Cymru		

Glossary

Cluster	A network of primary schools normally linked to a secondary school who are grouped together to collaborate to improve provision, including teaching practices
Curriculum mapping	A process of documenting, organising and aligning educational content, learning objectives and assessments to ensure a coherent and effective learning experience
Developmental stage	A specific phase in an individual's growth, characterised by distinct physical, cognitive, emotional and social changes
Gender diverse	A descriptive term used to refer to people whose gender identity or expression differs from the gender norms and expectations typically associated with the sex they were recorded as at birth. This includes, but is not limited to, people who identify as non-binary, transgender, or otherwise outside conventional binary gender categories. 'Gender diverse' is a descriptive and social term, not a legal category. 'Gender diverse' is not a term used in the Equality Act 2010. People who are transgender may hold the protected characteristic of gender reassignment under the Act, which provides specific legal protections
Gender norms	Socially and culturally constructed expectations about what is considered appropriate behaviour, appearance and roles for men, women, boys and girls within a society. Gender norms vary across cultures and change over time. In an education context, gender norms can influence pupils' subject choices, attainment, career aspirations, and wellbeing
Inclusion/inclusivity	A principle of equal opportunity and fairness, acceptance, respect and understanding for the diversity of individuals

Nurturing approaches	A focus on the emotional and social development of children, emphasising the importance of structure, routine, clear boundaries within a supportive environment
Progressive model	Designed around the needs, interests and experiences of pupils rather than a rigid and standardised syllabus
Pupil voice	The active participation of children and young people in shaping their educational experiences and informing decisions
School Health Research Network	A policy-practice-research partnership between Welsh Government, Public Health Wales, and Cardiff University established in 2013
Sex (biological)	Sex refers to the biological sex of a person recorded at birth as either male or female. Biological sex is determined by a range of physical and physiological characteristics including chromosomes, hormone profiles, and reproductive anatomy. Biological sex is legally and conceptually distinct from gender identity
Stori Cymru	The Welsh Government has awarded funding to Stori Cymru to deliver its three-year Addysg Cwtch Project to teachers and support staff in all schools and PRUs across Wales from April 2025. The training is divided into three progressive tiers and has been constructed following engagement with schools, parents and external experts. The aim of the project is to support the development of healthy, respectful relationships by providing staff with information and resources to enable them to deliver high-quality RSE with confidence. The Tier 1 'Addysg Cwtch' is a 6-session training programme for school staff on key RSE themes. Plans are in place for further engagement with stakeholders to develop Tier 2 and Tier 3 training
Trauma-informed practice	An approach that prioritises understanding the impact of trauma on individuals' mental health and behaviour by creating safe environments and adapting provision to help them recover and thrive

Values-based approaches

Practices that promote the teaching and learning of positive human values such as respect, integrity, honesty and compassion

Whole-school approach

A framework or ethos that integrates mental health and well-being into all aspects of the school environment and includes the collaboration of all staff, parents and pupils

Numbers – quantities and proportions

nearly all =	with very few exceptions
most =	90% or more
many =	70% or more
a majority =	over 60%
half =	50%
around half =	close to 50%
a minority =	below 40%
few =	below 20%
very few =	less than 10%

References

Estyn (2017) evaluates the quality of provision for healthy relationships education in schools in Wales and identifies strategies to support schools in improving provision and outcomes for pupils. Available at: [A review of healthy relationships education](#)

Estyn (2019) *assesses* the success of schools' approaches to supporting pupils' health and wellbeing. Available at: [Healthy and happy: school impact on pupils' health and wellbeing](#)

Estyn (2020) shares good practice in supporting lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) learners in schools and colleges Available at: [Celebrating diversity and promoting inclusion](#)

Estyn (2021) *considers* the incidence of peer-on-peer sexual harassment amongst secondary aged pupils and reviews the culture and processes that help protect and support them. Available at: [We Don't Tell our Teachers – Experiences of peer-on-peer sexual harassment among secondary school pupils in Wales](#)

Welsh Government (2023) *Research on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: Wave 2 report*. Available at [Research on the early implementation of Curriculum for Wales: Wave 2 report](#) (Accessed: 18 September 2025)

Pp.79-81 detail early findings on RSE CfW implementation from interviews with secondary school senior leaders. Senior leaders felt prepared to answer concerns or questions from parents, appointed RSE lead practitioners, and planned to embed RSE within the curriculum. There were requests from some senior leaders for more specific guidance on age-appropriateness of topics.

Welsh Government (2022) Relationships and Sexuality Statutory Guidance. Available at: [Relationships and Sexuality Statutory Guidance](#) (accessed 1 September 2025). This mandates that all maintained schools and PRUs must design and deliver their curriculum in accordance with the mandatory RSE Code

Welsh Government (2023) *Whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing: research bulletin*. Available at: [Whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing: research bulletin | GOV.WALES](#) (accessed: 10 October 2025)

This bulletin presents top line findings from a survey of school leaders and staff about the implementation of the whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing in their settings.

Welsh Government (2024) *Whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing: research bulletin (part 2)*. Available at: [Whole-school approach to emotional and mental wellbeing: research bulletin \(part 2\) | GOV.WALES](#) (accessed: 10 October 2025)

This bulletin presents top line findings from a survey of school leaders and staff about the implementation of the whole-school approach to emotional & mental wellbeing in their settings.