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THE VALUES

FOUNDATION

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RSE Policy Paper for Charedi Schools

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There has been much deliberation and some confusion regarding what schools must teach, should teach and can teach with regard to Relationships Education in Primary Schools and Relationships and Sex Education in secondary schools. This guidance paper for Charedi schools is based on RSE legal requirements and Department for Education guidance whilst considering in parallel the Charedi observance of Jewish law and culture with regard to the teaching of RSE which has been in existence for millennia.

- **UK law upholds the right of parents to guide the education of their children as fundamental and protected**
- **This is particularly true of educational content which has a moral character;** schools should not undermine the manner in which parents seek to bring up their children
- **Schools should respect the manner in which parents seek to raise their children in accordance with their own religious or philosophical convictions**

The Law, also known as “Regulations”, dictates that pupils must learn about:

- safety in forming and maintaining relationships,
- the characteristics of healthy relationships, and how relationships may affect physical and mental health and well-being.
- The education must be appropriate, having regard to the age and religious background of the pupils.

The Department for Education (DfE) has published Statutory Guidance recommending what should be studied within RSE.

- The DfE’s Guidance clearly states that the teaching of RSE must be done in an age appropriate and developmentally appropriate way and **must have regard for the religious background of the pupils and their families.**
- Therefore, schools can select what they teach from the DfE Guidance and justify their selection regarding age and faith.
- There is no requirement to teach sex education in primary school.

1. Faith schools must create and publish a robust RSE Policy taking into account the school's ethos, cohort and age appropriation.

The Statutory Guidance states that:

“Schools must have regard to the guidance, and where they depart from those parts of the guidance which state that they should (or should not) do something they will need to have good reasons for doing so.”

Therefore, schools can justifiably make a strong case regarding their choice of topics taking their stakeholders into account, as long as they fulfil their legal requirements as stated above.

In Charedi culture, **matters regarding relationships** are threaded through all teachings 24/7, whether it is in the study of Jewish law and practices (*Middos*) or in everyday dealings with each other (*bein odom lechavero*), or in teaching that all pupils must have respect for everyone and indeed all of G'd's creation – *Ezehu Mechubad, hamechabed es habriyos*, Who is honoured? One who honours all of G'ds creation.. Schools should proactively document their teaching of *derech erez*, respect, in every aspect to demonstrate that the school actively teaches and promotes respect for all. Schools should document either in writing, photographs (eg of wall displays or chessed projects) and also in video, examples of respect, in the school, **as part of their RSE policy**. Schools should also evidence examples of dealing with a number of groups who fall into the protected characteristics eg the elderly, disabled etc.

In Charedi culture, **matters regarding sex** are taboo. Sex is never discussed in any public forum and will only be discussed, as and when appropriate, with parents or individual mentors. This is either in deference to Charedi laws of modesty that govern many parts of their Jewish life or also in respect of the fact that sex before marriage does not exist therefore there is no place for this topic to be in school. (See later in “pastoral responsibility” regarding individual challenges). Therefore whilst the school must have a sex education policy, they should take advantage of offering private mentoring and teaching in this matter and liaising with parents as appropriate.

2. Schools should consider appropriate and sensitive ways of RSE teaching, including size of groups and teacher capability. Schools should consider their cohort realistically and plan for the individual as well as for year-groups. For example, some pupils will have full access to the internet and need to be educated accordingly whilst some will have limited, or in some cases, negligible access to the internet and also need to be educated accordingly.

Charedi schools must, in their policy, make provision for identifying and dealing with children who have gained access to knowledge about sexual practices, probably via the internet or a friend from mobile phones or other devices. In 2020, it is inevitable that, although a minority, some children will attain access to information that is sensitive in Charedi culture. It is very important that these individual children are briefed about the information they have accessed in order to give the Charedi viewpoint on this and also to alert the child and his parents of what the child has accessed and of the dangers of grooming and abuse that can take place online.

3. Schools must fulfil their equalities duty but also note that it is up to the discretion of the school as to whether they teach about same-sex parents. The

recommendation by the DfE is that this is addressed at some point during a child's education. Schools are only obliged, under the Public Sector Equality Duty, to do so if/when there is a same-sex family in a particular class and then the duty only stretches to that class, not the entire school. This also applies to pupils, parents and teachers in the school.

The same sex relationships Charedi children have are devoid of any sexual content. Therefore discussing LGBT falls into sex education. The concept of *same sex relationships* in Charedi culture is strong as the sexes are kept apart with regard to the laws of modesty referred to above, but this is by no means whatsoever about lesbian and gay relationships. Therefore there is no place to discuss LGBT as a general school subject nor to integrate this into other lessons. (see later in "pastoral responsibility" regarding individual challenges).

4. Schools must inform parents:

- ▮ **what pupils will be learning in RSE and when**
- ▮ **how the school promotes diversity and equality**
- ▮ **at what age RSE is taught and why you think this is age-appropriate**
- ▮ **in secondary schools, how parents can opt out**

Discussing RSE is a sensitive subject that must always be dealt with in a modest and discrete way in Charedi culture. Each school must find a way of evidencing that they have shared their RSE policy in with their parent body as well as informing them fully about opt out procedures. All correspondence in this matter must be carefully documented and filed within the school's RSE policy. Charedi schools could also consider the option of, whilst inviting parents to opt out of sex education, at the same time ask parents to verify that they take the responsibility of educating their children in these matters and do not want the school to do so.

5. Schools must prepare children for modern Britain and need to show how the school's RSE Policy does this whilst retaining the ethos of their school. Schools are also obliged to teach Fundamental British Values. It is important to note that Fundamental British Values are taken from the "Prevent" guidance where there is no mention of protected characteristics therein.

There are many ways in which Charedi schools can evidence how they prepare children for modern Britain whilst also promoting Fundamental British Values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs. Charedi schools must ensure they do this in a robust way demonstrating their respect and tolerance for the country in which they live.

6. Pastoral responsibilities.

Whilst matters concerning sex education and sexual matters are not dealt with in a public forum, schools must be aware of and make provision for issues that may arise within their student body such as abuse, grooming, sexual orientation. Schools must appoint a staff member in a pastoral role to deal with these issues sensitively and appropriately whilst continuing to maintain and promote the ethos of the school. All staff must be informed as to the roles and responsibilities of this staff member and refer pupils using a robust referral system. This should also be planned with Rabbinic guidance.

Summary

| ITEM | GENERAL APPLICATION | CHAREDI APPLICATION |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Create and publish a robust RSE Policy taking into account the school's ethos, cohort and age appropriation.</p> | <p>Every school has the opportunity to depart from the DfE guidance <u>as long as they make a robust case for this</u></p> | <p>Cite both <i>Mekoros</i>, Torah and Rabbinic sources, and Rabbinic direction to support the policy.</p> |
| <p>Some children will access information about RSE that is generally taboo in Charedi circles</p> | <p>All eventualities must be accounted for</p> | <p>Seek <i>Daas Torah</i>, Rabbinic advice as to how best to deal with this and plan support via pastoral provision. Also liaise with Shema Koli regarding abuse.</p> |
| <p>Teaching LGBT</p> | <p>Primary school - not mandatory; Secondary school - DfE guidance states "we expect all pupils to have been taught LGBT content at a timely point as part of this area of the curriculum."</p> | <p>Only DfE guidance requires this, not the law. Therefore there is a case to be made not to teach this as described in detail above – but individual pastoral needs must be taken care of.</p> |
| <p>Parental engagement</p> | <p>Schools are encouraged to engage parents in sharing RSE policy, curriculum and resources</p> | <p>Charedi schools should take advantage of this whilst also engaging parents in their responsibility in delivering RSE to their children.</p> |
| <p>Preparing pupils for modern Britain and promoting Fundamental British Values</p> | <p>All schools are obliged to prepare children for their residing country.</p> | <p>There are many strands Charedi schools can deliver in this topic.</p> |
| <p>Pastoral responsibilities</p> | <p>Schools with a strong ethos who do not teach certain topics in a group setting must simultaneously be aware of their responsibility to look after the pastoral needs of every child.</p> | <p>Schools can fulfil their RSE provision duty by ensuring that adequate provision is made for every eventuality in RSE.</p> |