Institute of Education

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Doctorate in Professional Educational Child and Adolescent Psychology

Exploring teacher and student voices to find examples of good practice to support the enactment of Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) in schools.

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Declaration

I, Perry Draper confirm that the work presented in my thesis is my own. Where information has been derived from other sources, I confirm that this has been indicated in the thesis.

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Abstract

Background: Relationships and sex education (RSE) has become compulsory in all schools since 2020. Whilst there is statutory guidance to support schools with the implementation of RSE, there are many challenges being faced which are having a negative impact on successful RSE. Stakeholders (in this research being teachers and students) have differing perspectives on what can be done to implement RSE well but the cohesiveness between them can sometimes be strained. Whilst understanding the negative effects of poor RSE is important, there is also a need to understand how RSE can be implemented well in schools as the benefits of RSE have wide reaching implications for the development of young people.

Aim: The aim of this thesis is to explore the voices of students and teachers to understand what can contribute to the successful enactment of RSE in schools. The research examined ways by which this is done from the two stakeholders, teachers and students. With the identified school, this research wanted to understand what is going well in their practices relating to RSE with hopes to apply these examples to other schools who may be having difficulties.

Method: The research used a case study approach with one school as its main sample. This school is an all-through provision meaning they have students on role from ages 4-18 years old across a primary, secondary and sixth form. Participants included both teachers and students from the primary and secondary school phases. To collect data, focus group were used with set questions related to RSE and how it is being implemented. To analyse the focus groups, a thematic analysis was conducted. The thematic analyses were firstly done separately and within for students and teachers. A second analysis was conducted across the teachers and students to see if there were any similarities or difference amongst the participants.

Findings: The findings revealed several approaches and methods being used by the case study school to have successful implementation of RSE. In particular, the school uses and acts upon student voice to ensure that they have a say in their learning. They also adopt dialogical classroom techniques which focuses on discussion across the curriculum in each classroom. These techniques help to foster rich and critical discussion on various topics which help to support language and communication skills. Other notable findings related to the need to develop positive relationships between stakeholders, parental involvement in the planning and teaching of RSE and autonomy for teachers and students to have a personalised curriculum with regards to RSE teaching.

Conclusions: Those in education have an important role to play when it comes to supporting students learning with RSE. To have success in this area is to have success in many other areas of development. This research has found examples of how RSE can be implemented well into other schools and should be used by other professionals, such as EPs, to foster better successes with the implementation of RSE.

Impact statement

This research explored how RSE is being enacted in schools and analysed how examples of good practice in a case study school can be applied to other schools or similar contexts. The understanding which has come from this research can inform others with regards to how they can also have successful RSE as part of their curriculum. This is particularly important given the nature of RSE and the current challenges being faced by many schools and teachers.

The research has implications within academia related to several areas. Firstly, RSE in England has faced many challenges and the viewpoint of current research has often focused on the negativity surrounding the implementation of the curriculum. This research has done the opposite to this. It has highlighted what can be done in schools and has offered a positive account of how this can be achieved. Secondly, the research method in this research primarily used student voice to have a better understanding of what students want in a curriculum. The use of student voice has more recently become a prominent field of study in research due to the desire to give students more input and a platform in their learning. This research has demonstrated how student voice can be championed and used to better inform professionals of how best to engage learners. The research therefore adds weight to the argument surrounding the use of student voice to inform practice.

As well as this, the research has implications outside of academia. Firstly, from a professional practice perspective, the research can be useful in supporting EPs and other professionals working within the education field. RSE enactment has challenges, and the unique position which EPs are in can offer valuable insights to other professionals as to how RSE can have success in schools. Second to this, good RSE is part of good public health, particularly for young people. This research can be used to inform how good RSE can be done in schools by providing an evidence base of examples to support planning and engagement. Additionally, should there be further research because of these findings, it can be determined how good RSE has potentially long-term effects for young people.

The impacts of this research can happen by disseminating the findings to the relevant parties who are directly and indirectly impacted by the teaching of RSE. One example can be by informing EPs. This can then be transferred to teachers' and parents within schools so that they can make informed decisions about how best to implement RSE. Additionally, the impact can be bought about by influencing policy makers related to the RSE guidance. The current policies outline examples of what schools can do to implement RSE. However, the policies were written as guidance when the new RSE legislation was put into place, meaning the evidence based may have been limited. This research has been able to provide several examples of what can be done by completing fieldwork related directly to the implementation of RSE in schools.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Problem statement

The aim of this thesis is to generate a better understanding of successful and promising approaches to support stakeholders' engagement with regards to Relationship and Sex Education (RSE). By understanding what schools are doing well to implement the new RSE curriculum could mean that other schools having a better understanding of what they can do in their own schools, should they be facing the difficulties outlined in this research.

The history of RSE has gone through several cultural shifts and policy changes in England over the years and whilst many changes have taken place, RSE in England has often been described as '*letting our young people down*' (Sullivan, 2021). This has led to a compulsory legal responsibility to implement RSE as part of the schools' curriculum for all children and young people (CYP).

Whilst there is now a legal requirement surrounding the enactment of such a curriculum in schools, Coram Life Education (2021), which provides relationships and health education to children, have said it has been "*inundated*" with requests from schools for support with teaching the new Relationships, Sex and Health Education curriculum (*cited in* Davis, 2021). They state that emerging themes have indicated that school staff feel unable to engage students and parents with sensitive topics and parents have concerns about what is being taught.

Further to this, the new curriculum, has also been met with protests against some of the changes, with particular protesters focusing on the LGBTQ+ inclusive aspects of relationships education, concerns with age-appropriate teachings and the absence of allowing parental opt-out on certain topics should they wish their CYP to not participate.

The problem therefore surrounds the issues that come with the legal responsibility on schools to implement the RSE curriculum and the opposing challenges being faced by many schools. As outlined by Government, schools are required to implement an RSE curriculum for all students which encompasses the statutory guidance. By not doing some there can be accountability measures in the form of OFSTED rating this area of student learning as inadequate. With this responsibility in mind, some teachers are feeling inadequately prepared, some parents want to opt their children out of the curriculum and some students feel they do not have agency over the content they would like to be taught about.

Yet further than this, at the heart of implementing the RSE curriculum, there is a need to address the concern of not meeting the needs of CYP to ensure that they develop a secure understanding of the biological, psychological and sociocultural perspectives of individual beings (Sex Education Forum, 2019). This means that there needs to be an understanding of what primary and secondary schools in England are currently doing well to fulfil these statutory requirements.

1.2 Research focus

As the new RSE curriculum is in its infancy, this could be the best time to understand what values, lessons, perspectives, resources and pedagogies schools are using to demonstrate their legal responsibility. However, as it appears that many schools are

finding it difficult to implement a RSE curriculum, it would be beneficial to focus on a school which is implementing RSE well. This in turn may provide evidence for what could be seen as examples of good practice and could thus be used to inform the work of other schools in England.

This research will explore this by utilizing teachers and student's voices to understand their perspectives of what contributes to successful enactment of RSE. This will mean drawing upon any approaches or pedagogies used in the school which foster success with engagement and understanding factors which make RSE feel beneficial to both students and teachers.

This will help to gain a holistic understanding of RSE in schools. Form this, the examples of good practice found can be translated to other schools so that they can have success with the enactment of RSE.

1.3 Researcher positionality

Interest in this area has been shaped as my time as both a student and teacher. As a student at a secondary and sixth form school outside of London, my RSE was, in my opinion, insufficient to equip me and my fellow students for the realities of adult life with regards to RSE. For example, it was primarily biological based looking at the science of conception with little thought on the differing types of relationships or learning beyond sex. Further to this, the school I attended was a religious school and the teaching came from a catholic perspective, thus limiting my overall experience.

Once I became a teacher, I was in a prime position to educate CYP on such issues by giving them space to voice what they want in their education. This was something which was imperative to my development as a teacher and for being an advocate for CYP.

In my role as a teacher, I promoted student voice by leading a project in my school titled 'Let's talk about sex!' which focused on working alongside sixth form students and consulting with them on what they wanted in a RSE curriculum. The aim of the project was to have students actively participate by contributing their views, concerns and areas of interest. By doing so, it was hoped to understand and appreciate their perceptions, which could be a factor in facilitating change in the enactment of RSE. Additionally, it gave students an opportunity to be active in their learning and gave them a platform to convey to other professionals what they wanted in a curriculum related to RSE.

The project involved them picking an area of RSE they felt was vital to be taught and being researchers to find evidence that their area should be part of the curriculum. They researched and presented their work to sexual health advisors who took on their work and promised to be mindful of it in their own practice. This was a project which highlighted the importance of engaging young people to ensure that a part of the curriculum, which is most relevant to them, considers their input and lived experiences.

This project was the starting point from which I started to value the voices of young people and appreciating that what they have to say has importance. This has filtrated through to my current position as a trainee educational psychologist where I now continue to promote student voice in all aspects of my work with CYP.

1.4 Theoretical framework informing the research

In research, the theoretical framework gives studies a well-defined basis for argument and helps to conceptualise the nature of the outlined research problem being addressed. The adoption of a framework is important as it supports the direction and focus of the research and can help to illuminate a phenomenon, in this case the perceptions of RSE and what is needed for successful enactment.

In this thesis, two theories have been adopted. The first is a systems theory, which considers not just the individual but the systems around them and how they influence each other. The second theory could be said to be more individualised and focuses on motivational factors for the self. Together, they offer a person-centred and holistic perspective, working together to understand the individual and those around them.

1.4.1 Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory

Firstly, from an educational perspective, an overarching theoretical framework will be based on Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory (2005). This means the research will take a systemic approach as a way of thinking and viewing the world of an individual by recognising the interlinking relationships that are embedded in their social environment (i.e., the links between school, parent and student and the wider systems influences by culture, morals and values). By understanding that the relationships of each system influence each other, one can understand that changes in one part of a related system can have an impact or change on another related system.
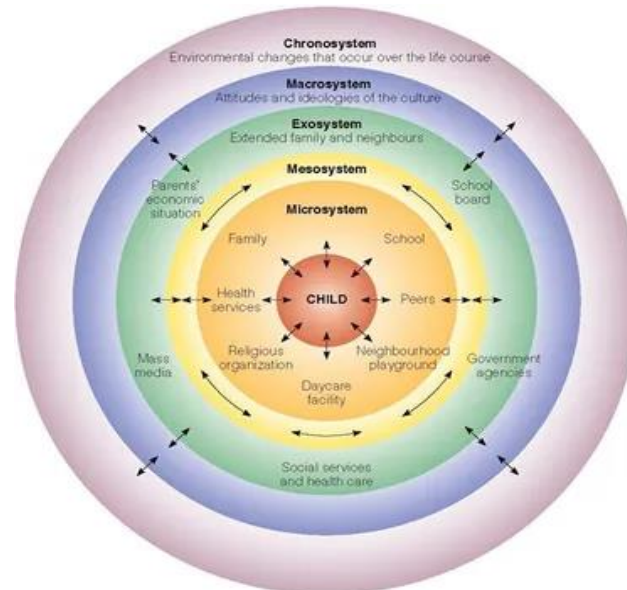
Image 1: A diagram showing each stage of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological system theory.

Related to the above image, these five systems are broken down as follows: Firstly, the microsystem which considers the personal interactions the child has in their immediate environment (E.g., parents, siblings, teachers and school peers). Secondly, by considering the mesosystem where the focus is on the child's experience with the interactions amongst two or more settings from the microsystem (E.g., when parents and school co-operate). Thirdly, acknowledging the exosystem, which includes

understanding the formal and informal social structures that indirectly influence the child (E.g., a parent having work commitments may impact the child). Fourthly, consideration of the macrosystem, which focuses on how cultural elements affect a child's development, such as socioeconomic status, wealth, poverty, and ethnicity. Finally, the influence of the chronosystem. This considers all the environmental changes that occur over a lifetime that influence development, including major life transitions, and historical events.

However, more than this, the research will consider the interrelationships among the concepts of the Process-Person-Context-Time model (PPCT). Firstly, this will mean considering the processes that come from understanding the interactions between an individual and their environment. Secondly, by acknowledging and perceiving the person by considering them and their biological characteristics (including age, gender, appearance, intelligence, some skills, etc). Then thirdly, by being considerate of the context and time of each person by referring to five "systems" to categorise influences on development. Furthermore, it may be argued that current PPCT model is quite vague and overly simplistic in how it can relate to an individual. Therefore, this research has decided to home in on the 'person' processes of the PPCT in order to give a more holistic or deeper perspective of the person in the context of RSE and how it relates to school.

1.4.2 Applying Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory to students

This framework can help to contribute to student wellbeing and successful RSE as it means adopting the view that CYP are affected by many factors in their surrounding environment and that systems interact. The interactions in the system are important to consider as they directly impact the individual at the centre. In this study, the systems of home life, school life and cultural attitudes will be chiefly considered as these are the main ones directly impacting the individual. Bronfenbrenner proposed that those closest to the child (I.e., the microsystem which includes family, school, health services, etc.) have the biggest influence on their development. This means that understanding the child's personal interactions within this system is important when considering the enactment of RSE.

By applying this model to the current research, it means that understanding the child's personal interactions within this system is important when considering sexual health and behaviours. Bronfenbrenner highlighted that the closest people to a child are the ones who have the biggest impact on their wellbeing, mainly because there are more opportunities for interactions. Therefore, in the context of RSE, a child's understanding of RSE will be reflective of the adults and the systems that they interact with. This means that professionals, such as EPs, need to be aware of the effects of their own actions and beliefs as their direct contact work can influence an individual's behaviour.

Additionally, the above model has been refined to include a more modern understanding of other influences from the environment. Johnson and Puplampu (2008) propose how the influence of non-living elements coming from technology (such as mobile phones, the internet and social media) can lead to communication differences in the immediate or direct environment. This may be from a generational divide, but nonetheless is important to consider given the extent to which communication technology is used by young people today. In the context of RSE, this

is highly relevant as the increased use of social media, and the internet in general, is shaping how CYP access sexual health information. This will therefore be important to be mindful of when considering how to understand the influence of the environment on behaviour and development.

1.4.3 Applying Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological systems theory to teachers

For teachers to have some success with student engagement, they need to have a good understanding of the environment around the students they are teaching (Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022). The theory is applicable to teachers as it allows teachers to think more clearly about the different, often interrelated, factors that influence how they work and succeed with the students in their class. This would mean understanding the influence and impact of many factors, including social and economic factors, and acknowledging that as teachers they are part of the student's system.

Bronfenbrenner's theory also states that there needs to be good links between each system in order to understand what is affecting a child's development (Zaatari and Maalouf, 2022). With this in mind, the theory can help teachers to strength the mesosystem by being the in-between facilitators by differing parties and acting as the bridge between the systems. This could be done by sharing relevant information to parents regarding a student and maintaining open and respectful communication dialogues with those around the student. When applied to the enactment of RSE, teachers can inform parents of how they are preparing to teacher certain topics and by communicating the importance and relevance of RSE.

When applying the PPCT model, teachers are in a strong position to understand the 'process' of a student's development. This includes grasping the interactions that occur between students and their school's ecological systems. This can be done by seeking and using student voice, listening to their wishes and adapting the school system to meet them and delivering curriculum which focus on meeting the needs of each student. When considering this aspect in relation to RSE, teachers can play a professional role in helping to determine if RSE teaching is not only meeting Government expectations but is also meeting their students' needs for what they desire from an RSE curriculum.

1.4.4 Self-determination theory (SDT)

The second framework being applied in this research will be the self-determination theory (SDT). SDT focused on factors that can contribute to increased motivation in social contexts (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The concept of having high self-determination can have positive impacts on one's wellbeing (Ryan and Deci, 2000). It also considers the social and cultural conditions that promote motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985). SDT does this by assuming that people are active organisms with tendencies towards psychological growth and development.
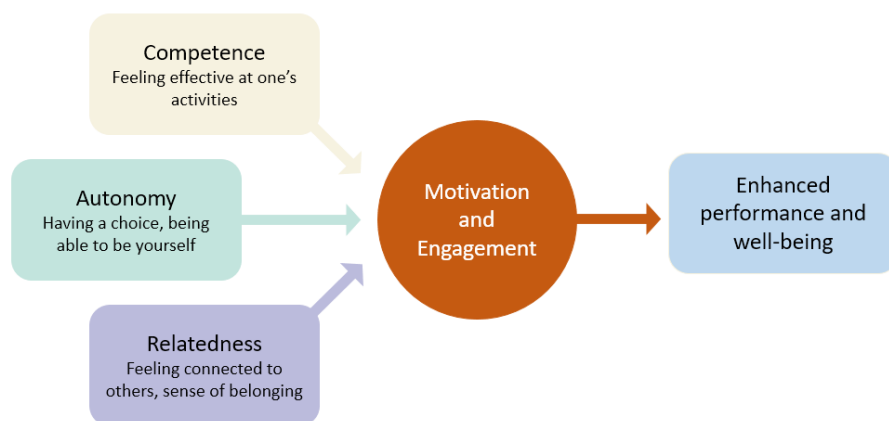
Image 2: A diagram showing each stage of Ryan and Deci's Self-determination theory (2005)

According to this theory, individuals have three needs that need to be met to become truly self-determined. These needs are autonomy, relatedness and competence. Firstly, to have a sense of autonomy refers to the need for individuals to feel in control of their own behaviours and goals. This sense of being able to take direct action that will result in real change as an individual can make them feel that they can do things for themselves. Secondly, competency is needed. This is a sense of achieving mastery of tasks and learning different skills as part of your development (Deci & Ryan, 1985). When people feel that they have the skills needed for success, they are more likely to take actions that will help them achieve their goals. Finally, relatedness refers to perceptions of connectedness or belongingness with others (Deci & Ryan, 1985) and is nurtured when others treat one in warm and caring ways (Reis & Franks, 1994).

1.4.5 Applying SDT to students

When applying the SDT to students there is a need to recognise what factors can be unpicked to understand what motivates them. This can be determined by breaking down each of the three needs.

Firstly, there needs to be an understanding as to whether students feel they have autonomy and control over their behaviours when it comes to the RSE curriculum. This means that the school environment needs to give students a sense of freedom to be themselves and explore their developmental progression without overbearing influence (Howard, Bureau, Guay, Chong and Ryan, 2021). In a school environment, this could mean that students feel they can take some ownership of the curriculum. For example, by offering to use student voice to better understand how they wish parts of a curriculum to be delivered.

Second to this, if the RSE curriculum is not giving students a sense of mastery to fully understand aspects of relationships and sex, it may mean that they are not achieving competency. The literature shows that RSE is not fully equipping students to be competent in their personal development and thus is something to be targeted if there is to be better success. This would mean that a curriculum is tailored to meet the needs of each student so that they feel confident to take their RSE learning away from the classroom and apply it into the real world.

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Finally, there needs to be an understanding of how schools promote connectedness as part of their school ethos in order to develop a sense of relatedness in an educational environment (i.e., If students feel affiliated with their peers and teachers). If a student does not feel a sense of belonging to their school environment, they can find it more challenging to want to attend, be part of the system and integrate with the systems around them (Reeve, Ryan, Deci, and Jang, 2012). Thomas (2012) found that a sense of belonging can be achieved by adopting school pedagogies which facilitate group work, discussion activities to help foster the development of peer relationships.

1.4.6 Applying SDT to teachers

It is also important to understand the SDT from a teacher's perspective as there are gatekeepers when it comes to teaching and enacting RSE. Essentially, teachers need to have a feeling of motivation to engage learners and wanting to teach in the classroom (Pelletier, and Rocchi, 2016). Again, this can be explored from the three needs of the SDT.

Firstly, when exploring autonomy, teachers need to experience a level of freedom to plan and deliver a curriculum which they deem to be the best to engage and support student students with their learning. Related to RSE, the development of a curriculum would need to be tailored to teacher's drawing on their own expertise and utilizing the resources they have and understand, as opposed to being prescribed a certain way to enact part of the scheme of work.

Second to this, teachers need to have a continuing development of competency with their teaching practice. This would mean that teachers feel they are confident enough to deliver a curriculum. When considering RSE, there is sensitivity which arises from certain topics in the curriculum which teachers note could be difficult to deliver. Therefore, if teachers are to have success in enacting RSE, they need to believe that they have the level of expertise to do so.

Finally, there needs to be a sense of connectedness which can be felt through teachings perceiving that they have support from those around them. For example, teaching feeling that there is management supporting them in their pedagogies or that there is a collective narrative on how best to deliver RSE.

1.5 Overall research aims and objectives

With RSE still raising issues in some schools, it may be beneficial to see if there are examples of best practice that may inform schools who are finding challenges when it comes to the development and enactment of an RSE curriculum. By uncovering examples of best practice, schools can use them in their own settings to have success with implementing RSE.

Therefore, the overall aim of this research is to explore insights into the perceived factors that contribute to the enactment of relationships and sex education in schools through an exploration of the views of students and teachers.

It is hoped that examples of good practice will be identified through conversations with research participants in the one school which has an all-through provision (i.e., one school site with a primary, secondary and sixth form school all in one place) and that these can then be used by EPs and others involved in education to inform the development and enactment of RSE.

Specifically, within the context of RSE being enacted in schools, the objectives for this piece of research are to:

1. Clarify current perspectives on what is being done in schools in the context of RSE through the development and enactment of an RSE curriculum through a literature review outlined in Chapter 2.
2. Evaluate critically the literature surrounding RSE and its enactment in schools. This will be demonstrated through the literature review and will critically evaluate:
    a. The key themes reported about how schools best develop, enact, and involve children and young people in an RSE curriculum.
    b. The commonalities and differences between the themes identified from the literature review and focus group analysis.
    c. What is reported to be the factors that help and hinder those in schools supporting learning about relationships, sexualities and sexual health.
3. To invite teachers and other educators to offer an insight into what is being done in the context of RSE through the development and enactment of an RSE curriculum in a primary and secondary school in a local authority. This will be done by exploring themes from the focus groups conducted in the fieldwork, which will be analysed in the findings chapter.
4. Discuss the findings from the literature review and participants' accounts taken from conducted fieldwork in focus groups and interviews and analyse their meaning and use for future recommendations. This will be outlined in the discussion chapter of this report.
5. Identify recommendations or implications, that arise from the above discussion for educational psychologists and others within the education sector when supporting schools to develop RSE curricula. This will involve communicating recommendations of what can be done to improve the enactment of RSE by exploring suggestions that participants have for improving RSE-related work in their own school and in other schools. This will also be outlined in the discussion chapter.

The outlined aims and objectives will be reviewed as the study develops to ensure they are in line with the findings from the literature review.

The next chapter will focus on the relevant literature in support of the above objectives based on RSE and how it is enacted in schools.

Chapter 2: Literature review

This chapter will address the first and second research objectives to clarify and analyse what is being done in schools in the context of RSE through the development and enactment of an RSE curriculum. To do this, the literature review will adopt a three-part strategy. This includes identifying a search data base to refine what literature will or will not be included. Secondly, by analysing the selected literature and being critical of the findings and understanding the themes that arise.

Finally, the literature review will synthesise the found themes and apply them to fieldwork to find commonalities or differences that can inform how RSE is successfully enacted.

A summary of findings from the overall literature review will be outlined at the end of this chapter.

2.1 Literature review search strategy

The following databases were used in the search for relevant papers: ScienceDirect; Google Scholar; ResearchGate; Education Database (ProQuest). There was a primary focus on research conducted and published in England. This was due to the nature of RSE being different in other countries due to differing Governments and policies.

However, some pieces of research from other countries or nations were used to understand RSE globally and make comparisons with England. For example, countries that have enacted RSE well and have shown reduced rates of sexual health-related concerns were used as some justification for the proper enactment of RSE in England.

Typically, the research included was conducted from 2007 with many papers coming from 2012 onward. This was to reflect the changing policies that have led to RSE being compulsory for all school in England. However, some research before 2007 has been included to help understand the landscape and history of RSE in England.

Key words included: Sex education; Relationships and sex education; school-based approaches; whole-based approaches; teacher impact, parental concerns; Young people's voices; RSE [AND] enactment issues; RSE [AND] health related concerns.

2.2 Defining key terms

2.2.1 Defining RSE

The first part of this literature was to clearly define RSE. This is due to the changing nature of RSE over the years and thus it was important to define and add clarity to what stakeholders, schools and students understand RSE to be in the current day context.

The Sex Education Forum defines RSE as learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health (Sex Education Forum, 2020). Drawing upon statutory guidance, when referring to RSE, the Department for Education states that "*children and young people need to know how to be safe and healthy, and how to manage their*

academic, personal and social lives in a positive way". (Department for Education, 2019).

These definitions encompass the broad nature of RSE and have been widely used by many in schools to decipher what is meant by RSE (Sex Education Forum, 2020). To execute the definitions, they envision that the RSE curriculum needs to support the development of pupils' knowledge and understandings of themselves as sexual beings, about what it means to be fully human, to live in right relationships with self and others and to be enabled to make moral decisions (Sex Education Forum, 2020).

The new RSE guidance can be understood as suggesting what is appropriate for either primary or secondary schools. In primary schools the focus should be on "teaching the fundamental building blocks and characteristics of positive relationships, with particular reference to friendships, family relationships, and relationships with other children and adults." (Department for Education, 2019). This would include the topics of families and the people who care for a child or children, caring friendships, respectful relationships, understanding online relationships and being safe.

In secondary schools, RSE should "*give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not just intimate relationships'* (Department for Education, 2019). It should, the DfE adds, enable them to know what a healthy relationship looks like and what makes a good friend, a good colleague and a successful marriage or other type of committed relationship. It should also cover contraception, developing intimate relationships and resisting pressure to have sex.

2.2.1 Defining enactment

A second key term used in this research is 'enactment'. This is a term coined by Stephen Ball as part of enactment theory and refers to the consideration that policies are understood and '*translated*' by the diverse stakeholders in the school environment, rather than simply being implemented (Braun, Maguire and Ball, 2010). There are many policies related to education and schools and thus there is an interest in understanding how stakeholders manage such policy demands. In the context of this research, the stakeholders are teachers, parents and students.

By using enactment theory, the use of RSE policy in education can be viewed as a dual process between these stakeholders (Singh 2014). This means that the stakeholders involved have an equal say on how a policy is used within the school, rather than certain stakeholders being passive to such policies.

Furthermore, when drawing on principles of enactment, there can be a constructivist element that considers the perspective of any relevant people directly involved in the policy, how it may affect them and what can be done to have success in drawing from a policy (Verger and Skedsmo, 2021).

2.3 RSE in context

RSE has changed significantly over the past three decades, with cultural shifts and policy changes shaping what is now understood as the current RSE curriculum.

In the early 1990s, the Department of Health launched their '*Health of the Nation*' strategy with sexual health concerns being one of the main priorities (Department of Health, 1992). Notwithstanding this strategy, a report completed a decade later found that little improvement had occurred, with sexually transmitted infections having increased and pregnancy rates staying roughly the same. Thus, concluding that sexual health had actually gotten worse (Adler, 2003). Adler summarised that the reasons for the decline in sexual health were due to increased demand for services, changes in sexual behaviour and political and financial influences.

Beyond this, the start of the millennium brought potential further changes for the development of sex education in England. For example, in the framework for Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), this supported RSE to be embedded into broader learning programmes (Sex Education Forum, 2020). There was also a duty on schools to promote the well-being of their pupils (Sex Education Forum, 2020) and the United Nations Committee on the Rights of the Child called for the introduction of mandatory RSE in the UK. They made recommendations that such education should provide age-appropriate information beyond the biology of sex and should include support on topics such as contraceptives, prevention of sexual abuse or exploitation and sexual bullying (Sex Education Forum, 2020).

Recently, due to pressure from educators and health campaign groups, the new RSE curriculum has been updated significantly for the first time in almost 20 years. The new RSE Government guidance was supported by Members of Parliament in a Parliamentary debate in 2019 and as a result, since 2020, parts of RSE have become compulsory in most schools in England, excluding independent schools (Department for Education, 2019).

With a phased start to implementing the new curriculum, all CYP in England can now expect RSE to be part of their curriculum in school. Due to COVID-19, the phased start was updated to allow schools to adjust and as a result, meant that RSE had to be fully implemented by the summer of 2021.

The main aim of RSE, as outlined by the Department for Education (2019) is to give young people the information they need to help them develop healthy, nurturing relationships of all kinds, not just intimate relationships. However, this aim may be at risk of assuming that 'giving information' is sufficient to prepare young people for adult relationships. When it may be more beneficial to enable young people to understand and apply issues of relevance to them that are grounded in issues that children and young people consider to be important.

2.4 Current RSE policies

The previous Government's Education White Paper, 'The Importance of Teaching (2010)' stated that '*children need high-quality sex and relationships education so they can make wise and informed choices*. They included the importance of working alongside teachers, parents, faith groups and campaign groups, such as Stonewall, to make sure sex and relationships education incorporates an understanding of the ways in which humans love each other and stresses the importance of respecting individual autonomy (Department for Education, 2010).

This previous statement has been maintained and current Government guidance states that all maintained secondary schools must provide sex and relationships

education as part of the basic curriculum and must meet the requirements of the national curriculum for science (Parliament. House of Commons, 2017).

In developing RSE programmes, schools are currently recommended to use the Sex and Relationship Education Guidance, published in 2000 (Department for Education, 2010) which will have different aspects depending on whether RSE is being offered in a primary or secondary school. While there is no breakdown of what should be delivered on a year-by-year basis, there are lists of statements provided by the Department for Education (2019) in the '*Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) and Health Education'* Guidance, about what students should know 'by the end of primary' and 'by the end of secondary'. With this in mind, there is a requirement to deliver a planned and developmental approach with learning sequenced across the key stages.

Firstly, there are age-appropriate requirements outlined in the Children and Social Work Act (2017) which requires all primary schools in England (ages 4-11) to teach age-appropriate 'relationships education'. The Department for Education recommends that all primary schools should have a sex and relationship education programme tailored to the age and the physical and emotional maturity of the children. It should ensure that both boys and girls know about puberty, conception and how a baby is born as set out in Key Stages 1 and 2 of the National Science Curriculum. There is also guidance which gives further information on what should be taught at these stages and how it should be rooted in the PSHE framework. In the early primary school years, education about relationships needs to focus on friendship, bullying and the building of self-esteem.

Second to this, all secondary schools in England (ages 11 –16) are required to teach age-appropriate 'relationships and sex education'. This includes teaching CYP about reproduction, sexuality and sexual health, although it does not promote early sexual activity or any particular sexual orientation. Secondary schools should include details in their policies on how they aim to provide a programme as part of the PSHE framework in addition to the National Science Curriculum topics. Secondary schools are required to set sex education within a broader base of self-esteem and responsibility for the consequences of one's actions. They are also encouraged to set a framework for establishing what is appropriate and inappropriate when it comes to the law and how to deal with individual questions on sensitive topics.

The Sex and Relationship Education Guidance (Department for Education, 2010) also ensures that those in schools involve parents to play a key role in what experience their children may have when it comes to the teaching of RSE. For instance, all schools must have a written up-to-date policy on sex education, which they must make available for inspection to parents for free (Parliament. House of Commons, 2017) and it must include information about parents' rights to withdrawal. The right to withdraw clause draws upon the Education Act (2011) which enables parents to withdraw their children from sex education other than the sex education that is in the National Curriculum (such as the biological aspects of human growth and reproduction that are essential elements of National Curriculum Science). In doing so, The Department for Education and Employment (DfEE) offers schools a standard pack of information for parents who withdraw their children from sex and relationship education (Parliament. House of Commons, 2017).

While the above policy is in place, there is a caveat that children can themselves decide to opt back into sex education from three terms before their 16th birthday (Parliament, House of Commons, 2017). This may mean that students have missed out on part of their learning with regards to relevant and important topics in RSE.

From a wider perspective, the new RSE guidance draws upon the Equality Act (2010) and seeks to include the entitlement of having an inclusive RSE curriculum, as the new curriculum will cover topics surrounding sexuality. This is particularly important considering that UNESCO (2020) regards sexuality as an integral part of life and thus CYP have a right to be taught about sexuality by receiving information from a reliable and comprehensive source base.

Indeed, the new RSE will include LGBTQIA+ issues being taught within the curriculum and not as a standalone topic. Although, whilst policy dictates that this area of RSE must be included, it has been met with some resistance by campaign groups such as 'Let Kids Be Kids' who argue that this aspect of RSE should be optional as there is a risk of sexualising children at a young age (Humanist UK, 2020). This perhaps feeds into parents also opting to withdraw their children from certain aspects of the curriculum.

Furthermore, around inclusion, the programme has an aim to be inclusive of those with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), advocates that faith perspectives can be considered and explored the medical and legal sides of RSE to provide a good foundation for the facts of what is right and wrong in the law (Department for Education, 2020).

The above policies thus indicate a wide range of topics and areas to support inclusion for many people of many different backgrounds. However, the enactment of policy is not without its challenges.

2.5 Challenges faced with current RSE polices

While the current RSE policies offer guidance on what needs to be covered and suggests ways by which this can be done, the legislative changes do not necessarily equate to improvements in sex education. When considering the changes and developments during the last 20 years since the policy changes, the challenges that are faced by those in and attached to schools attempting to develop and introduce a new RSE curriculum can be seen.

For instance, there have been significant changes with regards to the increased use of technology and its impact on our lives. The increasing ways in which CYP are accessing sexual health information and dating apps are leading adults to have concerns about what their children are seeing on such apps with regards to social media content. Examples of content may be sexual and lead to problematic outcomes such as poor body image or online sexual harassment (Scott, Smith, Formby, Hadley, Hallgarten, Hoyle and Tourountsis, 2020).

Additionally, we have seen society's way of thinking develop when considering gender, sexuality and sexual behaviour. Caltabiano, Castiglioni and De-Rose (2020) for instance, comment on the increased prominence of individual autonomy (relating to sexual lifestyle) and the dismissal of social control (operated by the family, the church, the state, or other social institutions). As a result, premarital and extramarital sexual intercourse, extramarital fertility, and homosexual relationships have become

more and more publicly known and established (Caltabiano, Castiglioni, and De-Rose, 2020).

There have also been changing outlooks on mental health which have shifted how we view and speak about the concerns surrounding it. These include the increase of mental health support such as talking therapies, wider access to agencies such as CAMHS and less stigma because of more positive attitudes when it comes to discussing mental health (Henderson, Potts, and Robinson, 2019). These examples alone demonstrate a shift surrounding mental health perspectives. However, while this is positive that more people are seeking treatment and advice it inevitably means there is a need for more resources and trained professionals to deal with such concerns. As the new RSE will include topics surrounding mental health and emotional wellbeing, it will be imperative that those delivering it have sufficient knowledge to guide, signpost and support the CYP receiving it.

When understanding sexual trends and physical development, it becomes clear that challenges arise surrounding the need for an RSE curriculum even more aligned with CYPs lives. For example, some research indicates that children are physically developing earlier, with some girls starting puberty earlier than the average age (Eckert-Lind, Busch, Petersen, Biro, Butler, Bräuner and Juul, 2020). Furthermore, young people today are taking part in a wider range of sexual practices, such as oral and anal sex, compared to 20 years ago (Lewis, Tanton, Mercer, Mitchell, Palmer, Macdowall, and Wellings, 2017). With these trends and developments directly impacting CYP, it again becomes clear that there needs to be ample support for those going through these changes or taking part in sexual practices.

It is therefore safe to say that the last 20 years have seen a lot of change in our views on sexuality relating to gender-related values, awareness, practices and identities. As a result, and with the focus on RSE being implemented in educational settings, there needs to be consideration of those who play vital roles within them, such as students, parents and teachers, to ensure that a good RSE is being developed and implemented. By learning from the varying voices from these three perspectives alone (from parents, students and teachers), it could add further insights to how the curriculum is delivered and will thus be explored to understand their influence on the RSE curriculum.

2.6 Parents/caregivers and the new RSE curriculum

Understanding parents' and caregivers' perspectives is an important consideration as research demonstrates that parents can influence their children's sexual ways of being as they are often a major source of information for sexual health information due to being seen as role models and thus, they have an influence on their views and attitudes (Aventin, Gough, McShane, Gillespie, O'Hare, Young and Lohan, 2020). In addition to this, meta-analyses have demonstrated that sexual health programmes involving parents can help to improve communication about RSE between parents and adolescents and as a result increase safer sex behaviour (Aventin, *et al.* 2020).

In the context of RSE, while many aspects of the RSE curriculum are compulsory, consent from parents is required for those under the age of 16 to participate. This has led to some parents removing their children from such learning due to some

expressing a concern regarding the right of schools to teach material that should be done in a family situation only (Hilton, 2021).

While some parents are suggesting that, as an alternative, they could do RSE at home, the research indicates this may not be happening. In a recent study, Nadeem, Cheema and Zameer (2021) found that approximately 46% of the parents responded to a survey looking at parent perceptions towards sex education and said that they had never even spoken to their child about sexual issues. Additionally, the Sex Education Forum (2019) surveyed YP on parental teachings of RSE and found 9% of YP did not learn anything about puberty from their parents.

When considering different types of learners who need access to RSE, some parents of children with SEND, particularly those with greater additional needs, have concerns that RSE will encourage sexual behaviours and, as a result, also opt to remove their children from the RSE curriculum (Pound, Denford, Shucksmith, Tanton, Johnson, Owen, Hutten, Mohan, Bonell, Abraham, and Campbell, 2017). However, contrary to this belief, evidence shows that effective RSE can delay first sexual experiences (Pound et al, 2017), thus demonstrating how some parents' preconceptions about RSE may be unjustified.

While some parents may not want their children to have all aspects of RSE, not all parents are of the same mind-set when it comes to their children receiving sex education. Stone (2017), for example, found that parents opted to encourage RSE, both at home and school, due to the need for truth and a threat of ignorance should their children not have a well-rounded understanding. Evidence like this can support the development of practice to encourage less confident parents to communicate sex education in school and at home.

The above research indicates conflicts between expectations of what RSE encompasses and what parents do when it comes to their child having an RSE understanding. What is clear is that there is a fundamental concern with parents saying they may want to educate their children about RSE at home, but this is not being done consistently, thus opening the door to concerns about where CYP are getting their RSE education from.

There may be several contributing factors which may influence whether a parent will teach RSE at home. Aventin, *et al*. (2020) comment that it may be a parent's inability to attend workshops due to other obligations, not having time or motivation, perceived embarrassment or underestimating the value of RSE. The impact of resisting enactment of the RSE curriculum may be a contributing factor to schools feeling disempowered in fully implementing an RSE curriculum and so an understanding of parents' views could be a consideration.

What is clear is that parents are key gatekeepers to their children opting in or out of the RSE and thus having access to information and opportunities to learn. With respect to those children who can or cannot participate in RSE in schools, it is an important area to explore if RSE is to reach all CYP and fulfil the statutory requirements set out by the Government.

However, it appears that many parental concerns stem from the unknown of what schools are or are not doing. Overall, most parents do opt for their children to partake in all aspects of RSE. With statutory guidance making it more difficult to remove children from RSE, there is less of an emphasis to focus on parental views

but rather student and teacher views, who are directly part of the curriculum and thus more in need of being listened to.

2.7 Students and the new RSE curriculum

To have a curriculum that represents the young people being taught would mean having the voice of students amplified in the final statutory guidance. By doing so, it can be argued that the curriculum is directly meeting the needs of CYP. The government has attempted to do such a thing by using a consultation process to elicit student voice by gathering their responses on what they would like in a curriculum. However, this consultation has been criticised. In a review of the consultation research, Setty and Dobson (2022) found that the responses to questions were often narrow and limiting. As a result, the findings were reducing the potential for young people to effect consultation outcomes when it comes to having a final document of guidance for RSE. Nonetheless, they recommend the use of consultation to gain student voice as a necessary part of developing RSE.

While the new statutory guidance recommends involving pupils in developing school policy, it appears that the voices of what students want in a curriculum are somewhat unheard. In an independent poll administered by the Sex Education Forum (2018) focusing on YP between 16 and 17 years old and their experiences of RSE, it was found that 23% said they didn't learn anything at all about how to tell if a relationship is healthy. These findings are echoed in the Government's research brief '*Experiences of Relationships and Sex Education, and sexual risk taking'* which found that just under half of YP described the RSE they received at school as either '*fairly useful'* or '*very useful'* and nearly 1 in 5 young people described the RSE received in school as *'not at all useful'* (Department for Education, 2021). It may be that some schools do not fully consider the usefulness of student voice as some may prioritise parental voice, due to concerns over the sensitivity of some RSE topics (Sex education forum, 2021). Nonetheless, student voice can offer valuable insights into what they want in an RSE curriculum and so should be sought from schools.

Additionally, one year later, the Sex Education Forum (2019) reported that only 41% rated their school based RSE as good or very good and 18% of YP said they learned nothing about LGBTQ+ issues at school. These results may indicate that the RSE curriculum is failing to meet the needs of all CYP and thus the fundamentals of promoting good well-being and healthy development for CYP may also be seen as insufficient.

Even more recent statistics highlight that there is still not enough being done in schools to conclude that the new RSE curriculum is being made use of in ways that support young people well. For instance, in a review of sexual abuse in schools and colleges, Ofsted (2021) found that sexual harassment and online sexual abuse were a bigger concern than parents believed. This was due to pupil reports, which gave information relating to the prevalence and content of online sexual abuse experienced. This may indicate that communication between parents and school is limited and an area that needs to be addressed.

Further to this, Setty and Dobson (2023) comment on how current government guidance is presently structured by adult-centric and heteronormative understandings of sex and relationships. This is limiting students' engagement with

RSE learning as the diversity of student needs is not going to be met due to the curriculum being rather narrow in its remit.

Ofsted (2021) has also noted that 88% of girls and 49% of boys reported that they have been sent explicit pictures or videos of things they do not want to see. This is similar to findings from a recent report by the British Board of Film Classification (BBFC) (2019) which reported how more than half of children have encountered porn by the age of 11 to 13 and children as young as 7 years old are able to access pornographic online. The BBFC concluded the need for age-verification on pornography sites at a minimum to change the easiness of access to young people (British Board of Film Classification, 2019). Both findings thus indicating that exposure to sexual content is a concern that needs to be addressed as there may be wider implications if the topic is left out of the curriculum.

Those involved in research in this field have also considered the importance of the context in which RSE is delivered when it comes to health outcomes. The longitudinal National Survey of Sexual Attitudes and Lifestyles found that young people who cited school lessons as their main source of information for RSE were less likely to be diagnosed with STIs and experience unplanned pregnancies (Macdowall, Wellings, Mercer, Nanchahal, Copas, McManus, Fenton, Erens and Johnson, 2006). This therefore emphasises the importance of teachers feeling well equipped to deliver the RSE curriculum.

Even though it may be that YPs needs are not being met through the new RSE curriculum, Emmerson (2020) found that YP will inevitably seek RSE information, as relationships and sex are part of their everyday lives. As identified, the ever-increasing use of social media and unregulated online forums, which can be sources of information, means that YP will unsurprisingly be exposed to inaccurate or biased information. This therefore reinforces the need for a robust curriculum to support CYP as they develop and progress in their studies.

Overall, the Department for Education research brief (2021) shows that most pupils learned about sexual matters from lessons at school, and that most of this group found them to be useful to some extent. However, there is disparity among those who receive RSE with those in marginalised groups being at more of a disadvantage.

From a student's perspective, what begins to become clear is that there is a need for improved RSE in schools, along with a greater involvement of parents and health professionals to meet their needs. This research will have a focus on student input to ensure there is more emphasis on capturing the CYP voice in the findings.

2.8 Teachers and the new RSE curriculum

The above research has indicated that students feel they get the most information from lessons in school, and the policy appears to put the responsibility on schools to teach CYP about RSE. Therefore, understanding teacher's perspectives is imperative in ensuring that the demands of the new RSE are being delivered well.

In a recent study offering insights into teacher's perceptions of sex education, Nadeem, Cheema and Zameer (2021) concluded that it is vital to educate the general population and train teachers to ensure the provision of high-quality sex education. This reflects the Government guidance, which has primarily put the

responsibility on teachers to put the RSE curriculum into action. This has initially been facilitated by online resources supplied by the Government to support teachers in their RSE teaching. However, upon inspection of the download numbers, at the time of writing, downloads range between 866 and 5000. This is a concern given that there are over 20,000 state schools in England and download numbers are relatively low. Added to this are the findings from a recent survey asking teachers about their confidence in delivering the RSE curriculum, which found 65% didn't feel confident to do so (Discovery Education, 2020).

These numbers may reflect concerns felt by teachers and their perceptions of their preparedness for the new RSE. The NSPCC (2019), for example, found in a poll of more than 2,000 teachers that 28% of them reported that their school is unprepared for new mandatory lessons and that 47% felt they lacked confidence in their own ability to deliver the new curriculum. For example, some challenges for teachers arise when deciding how to separate and teach the biological side of RSE to what the more sensitive topics can be surrounding feelings, sexual activity and respect for others (Hilton, 2021). Cumper, Adams, Onyejekwe and O'Reilly (2023) also found that teachers' felt a lack of training was a contributing challenging factor to implementing RSE in schools.

Further to this, even though there is a push to train teachers in how to deliver RSE, the School Standards Minister has admitted that only 4,800 schools have received training from the Government's *teach the teacher'* programme around the enactment of RSE (Lepper, 2021). It also appears that where training is being offered, teachers still feel inadequate. Hazell (2018) found that one fifth of teachers had 'no training whatsoever' to deliver topics in RSE and for those that had received training, 39% of those felt it was inadequate. These figures matter as they highlight the challenges being felt by teachers who have been put in a position to deliver RSE.

A recent piece of research has found some notable challenges that teachers are facing when it comes to implementing RSE successfully in schools. One challenge relates to the time restraints that teachers have when it comes to delivering RSE. Cumper, Adams, Onyejekwe and O'Reilly (2023) found that RSE can often be an add on subject taught for a small period during tutor time. As well as this, the other commitments that teachers' have can make it harder to fully embed RSE into everyday teaching. A second challenge found was concerns with consistency with other teachers who oversee leading RSE. Cumper, Adams, Onyejekwe and O'Reilly (2023) found that there were concerns that not every teacher is doing the right thing as the experience of teachers' is so varied, thus questioning the quality of RSE for every student.

Teachers have also shared their experiences of being challenged by parents in consultation about what should or shouldn't be included in their schools RSE curriculum (Hilton, 2021). One example is related to the withdrawal clause, where parents can opt their child out of certain parts of the RSE curriculum. This 'grey area' has left some teachers feeling cautious about what to teach as some topics may seem 'forbidden' (Hilton, 2021). These anxieties may further contribute to some teacher resistance to delivering a RSE curriculum that meets the needs of CYP, but also respects the wishes of parents/caregivers.

While there is evidence from teachers in schools where the challenges are being felt, this information does not help to solve the issue of implementing the RSE well.

Further to this, whilst many express that the training they had was insufficient, there does appear to be some who have found it worthwhile as the statistics don't reveal that all teachers feel ill-prepared.

Therefore, as not all schools are reporting such challenges, there must be examples of schools where the RSE curriculum is being implemented well and thus need to be explored to support other teachers and other schools. By doing so, there will be a more holistic understanding of how RSE can be successful even though it faces difficulties.

2.9 The cost of poor RSE

The outlined challenges can be further explored by assessing the wider impact of not having good RSE. Having sufficient RSE is imperative for CYP to go on and have healthy and successful relationships as they get older and leave formal education.

When understanding trends relating to the sexual behaviour of young people, the Department for Education (2021) found that young people who received no RSE in schools were more likely to go on and take more sexual risks, such as intercourse before the legal age of consent, unprotected sex and were often found to be more likely to contract a sexually transmitted infection (STI). In contrast, the paper also found that those who said that they were taught about consent, LGBTQ+ relationships, and relationships in general, were more likely to describe the RSE they received as useful than those who were not taught about these topics.

Furthermore, when related to the LGBTQ+ community, and researching the impact of sex education on sexual and reproductive health outcomes among women of sexual minorities (E.g., Lesbian or bisexual) Bodnar and Tornello (2019) found that receiving sex education on saying no to sex was associated with greater reports of birth control pill use and decreased reports of ever being pregnant. Thus, adding even more evidence to the need to have a sufficient RSE curriculum to provide even just the basics when it comes to sexual behaviour among young people.

When considering the impact of having poor RSE relating to marginalised groups, such as LGBTQ+, there appears to be an increased chance of young people engaging in risky sexual behaviours (Department for Education, 2021). This may indicate the need for RSE, and its teaching, to be more inclusive to meet the needs of the diversity seen in students in schools.

When delving into the specifics of RSE, part of the new RSE curriculum is designed to develop CYPs understanding of what is deemed a healthy relationship, however if this curriculum is not being fully accessed it may mean that CYP have a poor understanding of how to look for this. In fact, Ofsted (2021) found in a report that more than one in three young people report they still learn nothing about this topic in school, despite healthy relationships being a specific recommendation to implement into the new RSE (Ofsted, 2021). This is particularly important to consider when there is overwhelming evidence that pornography plays a destructive role in young people's understanding of healthy relationships (Ofsted, 2021).

Overall, there is sufficient evidence to support the idea that comprehensive RSE provided to all young people in England can reduce cases of having sex before the age of consent, improve use of contraception, reduce rates of unwanted pregnancy

and occurrences of multiple partnerships, and reduce the contraction of sexually transmitted infections (Department for Education 2021).

There is therefore a clear indication that implementing a good RSE curriculum has a positive impact on sexual health and other wide-ranging areas relating to children's and young people's development. Without sufficient RSE, research exploring the outcomes could be interpreted as highlighting that the cost of poor RSE outweighs the challenges faced when attempting to implement a successful RSE. The need for a robust programme is important and must be explored to understand how this can be done to support the needs of CYP.

2.10 The benefits of enacting an RSE curriculum (a whole-school approach)

While there are undoubtedly challenges with enacting an RSE curriculum, there is evidence that supports the idea that it can be done successfully, particularly with an emphasis on adopting a whole-school approach.

Many of the released resources from the UK Government are curriculum driven. This means that the focus is on planning RSE topics through a structured curriculum in a specific order. Whilst this may be useful to an extent, it may side-line the benefit of adopting a more whole-school approach that draws upon the wider systems of the school working together. This would include the consideration of key stakeholders such as parents, teachers, students and governors.

One piece of evidence, which focused on using the 'Health Promoting School model' (HPS), found that planning as part of a collaborative approach and includes the voices of students, parents and teachers was imperative to having a successful RSE curriculum (Ollis and Harrison, 2016).

More specifically, Ollis and Harrison (2016) also found that useful indicators of success came from sexuality education becoming a key school policy, teachers and key support staff engaging in professional learning, and parent forums being regularly conducted. Specifically, from a teacher's perspective, professional development was important to give them knowledge, information and activities designed to provide context. This supported their development through their confidence and planning of the content.

Furthermore, the study found that a shared vision with stakeholders was another important factor that contributed to a successful RSE curriculum being enacted in schools. They found that this supported the capacity of teachers to be self-reliant and was a way to build communication and trust with the whole school community (Ollis and Harrison, 2016). Exploring this further, they found that holding parent information nights were useful to demystify the content of what is included in a RSE curriculum, and that external support provided a mediation service between the school and outside agencies to reach consensus on the shared vision.

The above has been echoed by recent research. Bragg, Ponsford, Meiksin, Lohan, Melendez-Torres, Hadley, Young, Anne Barter, Taylor, Bonell (2022) found that adopting a whole school approach helped to enact RSE at an institutional and individual level. This meant there was more inclusion of key stakeholders which influenced its success. The systemic work included communicating with carers, promoting buy-in from the school community and setting homework activities to facilitate adult–child communication about intimate matters. This helped to overcome

the limitations of a curriculum-only RSE. They concluded that components beyond the curriculum (including material, professional and situational factors) can lead to successful enactment of RSE when they are integrated into the existing school system (Bragg, et al. 2022).

Therefore, a picture starts to emerge that RSE can be enacted well in schools well, but there needs to be certain factors in place to contribute to this. This will be important to explore to support examples of best practice.

2.11 Emerging issues and the rationale for research

Based on the above literature review and the analysis of the current research, if CYP are to have sufficient RSE which they value and benefit from, the issues outlined need to be resolved. By doing so, it may lead to better outcomes in many areas relating to sexual health, relationships and general well-being.

Research has indeed outlined the benefits when there are RSE programmes that are relevant to children and students that build on their own needs, concerns and interests. Such programmes include improving their analytical, communication and other life skills for health and well-being in relation to sexuality, human rights, values, healthy and respectful relationships, cultural and social norms, gender equality, non-discrimination, sexual behaviour, violence and gender-based violence, consent, sexual abuse and harmful practices (UNESCO, 2018).

Additionally, research also tells us that having good sex education is related to more positive sexual health decisions among young adults (Chin et al., 2012; Kirby, 2007) which adds even more weight to the argument surrounding the need to deliver a sufficient RSE curriculum to promote good well-being amongst CYP.

More recently, Renold *et al* (2023) found that young people described sex education as poor yet still state how they would like to be taught RSE as they can see the importance to their development. Renold *et al* (2023) found this by championing the young person's voice and acknowledges how they can advocate for what they would like to see in a curriculum.

Overall, the evidence outlined indicates that when schools create a curriculum and engage young people through implementing a comprehensive and inclusive RSE curriculum, it enables CYP by empowering them to be more informed, make safer choices and have healthier outcomes (Department for Education, 2020). The Sex Education Forum (2019) highlights this further by commenting that when CYP have a significant understanding of RSE, they are more likely to have better sexual outcomes. However, the evidence in this field is limited and more is needed to fully assess how RSE can be enacted well to support CYP.

Due to this area seemingly being a concern faced by many schools, where there are difficulties in implementing the new RSE curriculum from varying perspectives, it would appear more beneficial for schools to have an understanding of what *is* working in schools as opposed to what *isn't* working. When paired with the outlined costs of poor RSE, it becomes evident that schools may be failing CYP with the fundamentals of RSE which thus highlights the need to examples of best practice to be use in schools to change this narrative.

With the above in mind, not only would the successful enactment of an RSE programme benefit the CYP who receive it, but it could also potentially positively influence the systems surrounding them which include parents/caregivers and the school setting (involving teachers). Therefore, the relevance of this research at hand, to find examples of best practice to enact the RSE curriculum, means to support CYP in a more holistic way which can support their development through an important time of their lives when support is greatly needed.

The rationale of this research is therefore to explore a school where RSE is being delivered to a good standard and where all aspects of the RSE curriculum is being implemented with all students. As a result, of the findings, it may be possible to use these schools as examples for other schools that may be finding it difficult to implement the curriculum. There will be an explicit focus on schools that are having some success in engaging students in the RSE curriculum and could therefore be used as an example of good practice for other educators.

2.12 Research questions

In conclusion, four main research questions have emerged from the literature review in conjunction with the aims and objectives of the study. These questions will be reviewed as the study develops.

1. What strategies and approaches are schools currently using to implement a good RSE curriculum?
2. How can examples of good practice be applied to other schools?
3. From a teacher's perspective, what factors are creating effective ways of implementing good quality RSE?
4. What do key stakeholders want in an RSE curriculum in order to feel it is beneficial to them?

These questions will be directly responded to in the discussion chapter once the fieldwork has been completed.

2.12 Summary of key points from the literature review

The literature review has highlighted several key areas that are relevant to this research and the outlined objectives.

Firstly, stakeholder views are vital to ensure there is some success in the enactment of RSE. It appears that this is not consistently done, particularly at a systemic level. To include the voices of teachers and students will be essential to fully comprehending the needs of a school and how best they can enact RSE.

Secondly, there are many challenges that contribute to schools finding it difficult to enact policy related to RSE. These challenges vary, but there is a need to find out more specifics about the challenges and how they can be overcome or addressed. By doing so, there can be better implementation of the RSE curriculum. In opposition to this, it is important to find out what schools are doing well when it comes to RSE implementation. The research is often skewed towards the negative outcomes of poor RSE and thus to have a positive view will even the literature out to add more holistic understandings to how it is developed and taught in schools.

Finally, the cost of poor RSE is an increasing concern that if not addressed may lead to poorer health outcomes, particularly for young people. Therefore, ways to overcome this need to be addressed to help contribute to a potential shift in health concerns relating to RSE.

Chapter 3: Methodology

This chapter will outline the research approaches being adopted that informs the research paradigm. It will then outline the design being used, in this research a case study design in one school is being used. Following this, the methods used to select and recruit participants will be addressed to understand the types of participants being used and where they will be recruited from.

The second part of this chapter will outline how data is to be collected and analysed. This will be in the form of focus groups for students and teachers. To analyse these the findings a thematic analysis will be adopted. Firstly, within and then across each case.

Finally, ethical issues are considered to ensure that the safety of participants is paramount to the study. These are outlined in accordance with ethical approval procedures.

3.1 Research approach

3.1.1 Ontological & epistemological stances to inform the research paradigm

For this research, the ontological and epistemological perspectives were, respectively, drawing upon both constructivism and interpretivism. This helped to shape the research paradigm and methodology.

The ontological stance stems from understanding a specific belief about reality and knowledge and how different perspectives on existing may relate to others (Crotty, 1998). The ontological research framing underpinning the research was from a constructivism approach as it was important to understand the perspectives of teachers and students by acknowledging that they actively construct or make their own knowledge and practice based on their environment (Burr, 2015). But more so than this, there was a need to understand how the nature of their social world is constructed through the interacting systems that influence their perspectives. As RSE is varied and unique in its nature, using a constructivist perspective will gain information from the teachers and students own understanding and thus should add to a more holistic understanding of the area overall.

The epistemological stance relates to analysing what knowledge someone has and how we understand what it means. The epistemological stance will aim to understand and analyse the participant's reality using interpretivism. This will be done by acknowledging that their reality and the knowledge they hold are not objective but influenced by people within that environment (Crotty, 1999). In the context of RSE, this will be influenced by the systems (teachers, parents and students) surrounding them. By gaining their knowledge and interpreting the meaning of their reality, there will be a subjective perspective that will need to be recognised in the research findings (Burr, 2015). This reality will be captured by the researcher, who attempted to understand the meaning behind the words of the students and teachers. From my own position, due to the subjectivity of information gathered from the participants, I as the researcher will need to understand or interpret the beliefs, motives, and reasons of them to understand their social reality.

Both approaches relate to the outline PPCT framing outlined in Chapter 1 as it links into being aware of the five systems around an individual and understanding how these can be interpreted to understand their perceptions of RSE. As mentioned, there is a particular emphasis on the '*person*' part of the model to highlight the importance of valuing the voices from both teachers and students.

Other stances were considered for this research, especially objectivism and positivism. However, by adopting a positivist or objective perspective, the unique views of participants may be lost as it may be difficult to understand the reason behind the collected data.

The above stances lend themselves to the opportunity of understanding the participants from a meaningful perspective. The variety of how the participants experience the world, and in context, have experienced RSE, will offer valuable insights to address the questions outlined in the literature review.

3.2 Research design

3.2.1 The case study design

A focused case study was used with a qualitative design. The proposed questions from the literature review influenced the data collection method being used which were focus groups. The focus groups focused on exploring the complex issue of RSE in the real-life setting of the selected school.

Yin (1984) identifies a case study as an inquiry that investigates a contemporary social phenomenon within its real-life context, where the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clear and where multiple sources of evidence are used.

3.2.2 Justification for a case study design

In the context of RSE, the case study design can therefore be justified as the enactment of RSE is influenced by the cultural, social and systemic behaviours of the choices made by those receiving it (E.g. Parents and YP choice to partake after a certain age). Additionally, RSE is primarily being delivered in the real-life context of schools but with some parents opting to deliver some parts at home. Finally, the evidence needed to understand how RSE is being delivered can come from multiple sources such as online forums, school policy and research papers.

Furthermore, drawing upon research from Hew and Hara (2007), a case study design was adopted for this research as schools can be classified as institutions. In addition to this, the case study method was used as there is a focus on examining such institutes in an in-depth manner to understand an occurrence and appreciate the interactions between and among individuals, in this case, teachers and students.

When building upon the nature of RSE being in a real-life context where there are many individual differences in the people who are part of the curriculum, there are benefits to using a case study design. One is that human behaviour is too nuanced to be studied in isolation in experiments. Instead, as Eysenck (1976) informs, there is a need to focus on what we can learn from research of humans and not what we can prove (Eysenck, 1976). Additionally, the PPCT model is relevant to describing the

use of a case study design. The model outlines the interactions between the varying systems and how the reciprocal interactions can influence one another. Therefore, the use of a case can help to allow the exploration of these interactions without being constrained by an experimental design.

In this research, each group of participants (students and teachers) were considered separate cases and the data analysis was within each case. However, there was also a cross-case analysis. This means that the data collected from the focus group with students (both primary and secondary students) was firstly analysed separately from the data collected from the focus group with teachers (both primary and secondary students).

After this there was a cross-case analysis comparing both students and teachers together. This allowed for the identification of particular issues according to phase (i.e. primary or secondary) but also common themes across the phases.

As proposed by Yin (2003), this research was conducted with the use of sub-groups that relate to an overarching case, in this research the overarching case is RSE and its enactment in schools. The 2 sub-groups were teachers and students. The teacher sub-group relates to those who are part of designing and delivering the RSE curriculum. Secondly, the student sub-group, which refers to those who have experienced RSE as part of their school curriculum.

With the above in mind, the use of a case study design in the context of RSE enabled evidence to be collected which can help to understand what needs to be done to deliver a sufficient curriculum for CYP.

3.2.3 The quality of the case study method

Qualitative research often comes with unique considerations that should be considered to ensure there are markers of quality which can help to judge the goodness of qualitative studies. In this case, criteria were outlined and explored by adopting Tracy and Hinrich's eight criteria for qualitative quality: (1) worthy topic; (2) rich rigor; (3) sincerity; (4) credibility; (5) resonance; (6) significant contribution; (7) ethics; and (8) meaningful coherence (Tracy and Hinrich, 2017).

The use of each criteria is applied through the research and a summary relating to the above criteria can be found in appendix 12. It outlines how this research upheld the markers to ensure a high level of quality whilst using the case study method.

3.3 Research methods

3.3.1 Methods for the fieldwork - Sampling and participant selection

The sample used a purposive sampling technique. This has been selected as there was a desire to select specific participants who meet criteria as outlined below.

Participants were from one school which comprises of one primary and one secondary school as one setting, in England. The reason for both a primary and secondary school is since RSE is implemented in both and different parts of the RSE curriculum are implemented in different schools. From each of these schools there were participants in the form of:

- 6 teachers in the primary school focus group
- 6 teachers in the secondary school focus group
- 6 students in the primary school focus group
- 6 students in the secondary school focus group.

Therefore, there were a total of 24 participants.

A range of possible strategies were adopted to select the case study school. This was firstly using links that the researcher has to schools that they believe they are enacting RSE well. The links for schools also came from the use of social media (e.g. Education Twitter) and the use of a poster advertisement outlining the research. From this, an informal questionnaire was used to determine their suitability (found in the appendix).

The criteria for selecting the **School (primary and secondary)** included:
- Being based in the same Local Authority (LA).
- Having a diverse demographic population (e.g., diverse in gender, ethnicity, religious background, etc.).
- An OFSTED report that has indicated sufficient implementation of an RSE curriculum.
- Have developed a good RSE curriculum that encompasses all the statutory requirements and is diverse in nature. This was determined by discussions with experts in this area (e.g., Sex Education Forum) who gave suggestions of what success means in the RSE curriculum and by cross-referencing this with the school's scheme of work for their RSE curriculum.

The criteria used to select the **teachers** included;
- Having knowledge of the current policies surrounding RSE
- having direct involvement in the planning of the RSE curriculum in their school
- Have taught the RSE curriculum to their students.
- The teachers who meet the above criteria were selected by using purposive sampling.

The criteria used to select the **students** included;
- Being in years 6 and 11 (I.e. transition years)
- Drawing upon teachers who participate in the focus groups to support the selection of students who they believe will offer valuable and useful insights to the focus groups.
- Those who were not excused from any part of the curriculum (either by parents or themselves, depending on age).

To recruit participants, a purposive sampling method was used, which was done by using school links that the researcher has. This meant that selected teachers used their knowledge of students to select relevant ones to take part. This was based on knowing how well students would participate in the focus groups. With the selection criteria in place (as above), information and consent forms were issued to all participants.

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 The use of focus groups

A range of possible strategies were adopted to collect data. There was an emphasis on focus groups for the majority of participants.

Focus groups can be defined as a method that draws upon the experiences of those who share a commonality (Lavrakas, 2008). They are done by conducting a collective interview which is semi-structured in nature and offers powerful insights into people's thoughts and feelings (Lavrakas, 2008), in this context focusing on real-life experiences of RSE and its enactment.

Focus groups have been selected as they enable the opportunity to gain rich perceptions, opinions, ideas and understandings from teachers and students' perspectives whereby complex themes will be analysed for discussion. Additionally, focus groups were selected over the use of interviews as they offer the opportunity to exchange viewpoints with those who are part of the focus group. This dynamic is difficult to achieve in a one-on-one interview.

The topic of RSE also lends itself well to focus groups as there are mixed ideas about how RSE should be delivered (when considering the differing perspectives from parents, schools and students) and so viewpoint exchange by those of interest in the area is highly desirable as it may lead to understanding commonalities or differences in what makes a successful RSE curriculum.

Moreover, as the topic of RSE is socially sensitive, the use of focus groups is even more suitable, as they can help facilitate guided conversations with those who are similar (E.g., all being students of the same age in one school).

For this research focus groups were conducted in two ways. Student focus groups were conducted face to face in the case study school whereas teacher focus groups were conducted online.

Efforts were made to conduct all focus groups face to face; however, teacher demands meant that it was extremely difficult to get the number of required teachers together at the same time. For example, other commitments included exam marking, unexpected daily occurrences related to student behaviour, leadership meetings and school CPD.

There are, of course, some advantages and disadvantages to consider when using focus groups.

Firstly, participants may not voice opinions freely, particularly in relation to sensitive topics, as they may be cautious about the answers they give. To overcome this issue, it was important to cultivate a focus group environment that was open and to have a strong moderator to challenge participants, get everyone to speak, and make them feel comfortable with voicing differing opinions.

Second to this, the focus group composition may not be representative of the wider population as the sample may be biased. This means the opinions expressed by the participants might not represent the views of society. To overcome this, there was a need to be stringent with sampling techniques to recruit as diverse a group of participants as possible.

Finally, related to the use of online focus groups, there were both benefits and drawbacks. There were benefits of conducting focus groups online which allowed for flexibility and ensured that it was easier to get all the participants together at the same time in one location. However, it could also be difficult to convey emotions and build rapport through a camera. This is because, the online setting is not a 'natural' setting by which participants can fully express their emotions and thus some people may have behaved differently as opposed to face-to-face focus groups.

3.4.2 Procedure of focus groups

Using the qualitative research method, 4 focus groups in total were conducted to collect data. The focus groups engaged with teachers and students who meet the criteria and ran for approximately one hour each.

From the school, there were 2 teacher focus groups. One focus group consisted of primary school teachers and the other consisted of secondary school teachers. The remaining 2 focus groups were for students. One focus group consisted of primary school students and the other consisted of secondary school students.

Each focus group ran independently of one another and there was a set of semi-structured questions for each. The final questions are relevant to the findings of the literature review and are different depending on whether the focus group was attended by teachers or students. The full list of questions can be seen in tables 1 and 2 below and were asked directly by the researcher.

Table 1

Teacher Focus Group Questions
1. What strategies and methods are you currently using to develop a good RSE curriculum? (Prompt: listening to YP and what they value)
2. What factors are creating effective ways of implementing good quality RSE? (EP, outsourcing, CPD)
3. What support have teachers received to deliver RSE?
4. How do you approach and deliver the sensitive topics in RSE?
5. How have you worked with parents to encourage their children to opt into RSE?
6. How did you develop the programme (children and young people, parents' other sources?)
7. What led to inclusion and omission of topics?
8. How is RSE taught in school?
9. What has gone well – and not so well (prompt: challenging topics)
10. Are there any areas for improvement? (Maybe suggestions to others)
11. was an EP involved in the planning of the RSE curriculum? If so, in what way and how useful was this?
12. If an EP was not involved, would it have been helpful to have EP involvement and in what way?

Table 2

Student Focus Group Questions
1. How do you feel RSE is preparing you as you get older?
2. What has been the best aspect of being taught RSE?
3. What do you want in an RSE curriculum in order to feel it is beneficial to you?
4. How do you feel when it comes to having RSE about sensitive topics?
5. Do you believe you get enough information from your RSE teaching to make informed choices? (E.g., informed choices about making friends, having sexual relationships, etc.)

While semi-structured questions were primarily used, the nature of focus groups naturally lend themselves to other areas of topics being explored, depending on the nature of the group's conversation. The full transcripts of each focus group can be found in the appendix.

As a measure of consistency, all focus groups took place at the same time of day and were held at a time to suit all participants involved.

3.5 Data Analysis

3.5.1 Thematic Analysis

The data was analysed by the researcher using thematic analysis to analyse the data collected from the 4 focus groups. In total, there 3 thematic analyses were conducted. These were as follows:

- Thematic analysis 1: Student focus group analysis (for primary and secondary school students)
- Thematic analysis 2: Teacher focus group analysis (for primary and secondary school teachers)
- Thematic analysis 3: Comparative analysis of student focus groups with teacher groups.

The thematic analysis was conducted this way to emphasis the difference and similarities between students and teachers. Furthermore, the use of one school means that there is a shared system of how the curriculum runs throughout all phases.

The framework to conduct and run the focus groups was based on the theoretical position of the 'six step' outline taken from the Braun and Clark (2006) paper. This paper is widely recognised as a good standard by which to conduct a thematic analysis. These steps included familiarising yourself with the data', 'generating initial codes', 'searching for themes', 'reviewing potential themes', 'defining and naming themes' and 'producing the report'.

Firstly, audio recordings were transcribed using the online platform 'Otter.ai'. The researcher checked each transcript for any inaccuracies and to familiarise themselves with the data. Transcripts for each focus group can be found in the appendix.

The audio data was transcribed into written format transcripts and from these transcripts, a thematic analysis was conducted to explore themes within the discussions. With the 4 transcripts, the researcher read through each and generated codes for common topics relating to RSE and its teaching in schools. Each time a topic came up in the transcript, the researcher tallied it to give an overall total of each. This was done for each question. Once each transcript was analysed, topics were colour-coded and finally put into a relevant theme. These themes were reviewed to ensure that subordinate themes did not overlap.

The use of a thematic analysis was rationalised as it gave the opportunity to summarise key features of a data set taken from the 4 focus groups and it enabled the ability to take a well-structured approach to handling data to answer the research questions outlined in the literature review.

Notably, other considerations were given to the use of interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), but TA was selected for a few reasons. Firstly, there was a desire to work with a larger sample to gain more insights into the topic. The nature of IPA, typically, lends itself to smaller samples, thus adding weight to the use of TA. Second to this, there was an aim to identify patterned data across the stakeholder's (teachers and students), to triangulate the best way to enact RSE. Therefore, by using TA over IPA it would mean that patterns or similarities may be found and then used in schools.

3.5.2 Reliability of identified codes and themes

As a measure of consistency and to ensure that the identified codes and themes were accurate, there was a reflection and discussion of themes with supervisors and other doctorate students, this was used to determine a level of trustworthiness. This was done by two researchers separately analysing the focus group transcripts and then comparing any similarities or differences found to come to an agreement. O'Connor and Joffe (2020) mention coding reliability as having benefits for research to increase the systematicity, communicability, and transparency of the coding process. This can help to promote reflexivity, which in turn can help convince diverse audiences of the trustworthiness of the thematic analysis (O'Connor and Joffe, 2020).

Based on this, the coding of sub-ordinate themes and sub-themes were discussed with academic supervisors and with trainee EPs who were also completing the doctorate training at the Institute of Education. Based on these discussions, sub-ordinate themes and sub-themes were refined to ensure they were in line with the research questions. This method of reliability helped to reduce researcher bias when analysing and discussing the findings of the focus groups.

As a further measure of reliability, the focus group transcripts were typed onto a Word document and any data which had been coded into themes were removed from the document. The remaining data (i.e., anything else that participants said in the focus group) were re-analysed to see if they fit into any theme or sub-theme. This ensured that all data had been thoroughly checked and no pieces of potentially key information was left out.

3.6 Reflexivity, validity and trustworthiness

3.6.1 Reflexivity

In social research. reflexivity refers to the awareness of the influence the researcher has on the people or topic being studied, in this case the topic of RSE, while at the same time recognising how the research experience is affecting the researcher (Gilgun, 2008). As this research is qualitative in nature, using a case study and focus groups, there must be acknowledgement that the researcher's views, beliefs and judgements may have influenced part of the data collection process which in turn may have influenced the overall findings (Probst, 2015).

With the above in mind, there was a need to remain reflexive throughout the research process. It was necessary for the researcher to maintain a professional boundary between the group and researcher by acting as a facilitator without expressing one's own views on RSE.

From a researcher's perspective, impartiality was also very important when data was being analysed using thematic analysis. From the data analysis, this was done by ensuring codes and themes were discussed in supervision to determine a level of reliability. From the researchers own perspective, this was done by being aware of my own position as a researcher conducting focus groups and being mindful that my own views did not influence the focus groups or data interpretations. Finally, when the interpretation of the findings was conducted it was important to ensure a level of trust and independence in the findings so that sound recommendations can be made without the influence of beliefs or values from the researcher.

3.6.2 Validity and trustworthiness

It was also important to consider the credibility of the research by evaluating the validity of using a thematic analysis. Yardley (2015) offers established criteria by which this can be done as outlined below. By using these criteria, a sense of trustworthiness and the overall quality of the research can be enhanced.

Sensitivity to context

I ensured that I gathered sufficient information from the literature review to make sure that I correctly conveyed my aims and objectives to the research participants. In doing so, I was able to identify specific gaps related to RSE and planned to use research in the area which was important to consider given the need for better RSE in schools.

In relation to my participants, I adhered to ethical considerations by reiterating them at every step of the way. For example, by ensuring that participants could leave the focus group at any time, this was particularly relevant given the sensitivity of topics within RSE.

Commitment and rigour

To demonstrate rigour, I worked in a systematic way when it came to the thematic analysis. Firstly, this meant ensuring there was no overlap of themes or subthemes and that identified themes could not fit into other ones. This added an element of validity to my overall findings as it meant that the themes were distinctive enough to offer insights into RSE. Secondly, each theme was illustrated by participant's quotes

taken directly from the focus group transcripts. This helped to capture the voice of the participant and support the claims identified in the discussion chapter of this paper.

Furthermore, ample time was committed to the analysis of all focus groups. The analysis was further checked with doctoral students and supervisors to ensure the validity of my findings.

There were high levels of commitment dedicated to the research process. This included keeping track of transcripts and meetings with schools to have paper trials that could show the development of my research at each stage. Commitment was also shown by using a wide range of participants and having a detailed criterion to ensure there was diversity in the final sample.

Coherence and transparency

Transparency can be seen in the presentation of detailed coding and themes, found in the final appendices. They also offer colour-codes to show the frequency of each code and how this led to identifying the most common theme from the focus group analysis.

I have also been part of peer TEP development groups as part of my research process. This had meant meeting regularly to liaise with other trainees and support the refinement of my research. Several changes have taken place as part of the reflecting space to develop elements of my research.

Further to this, I have taken on feedback in supervisory meetings, and I reflected on such feedback by revisiting the research questions and aims of the research on a regular basis.

Impact and importance

I have outlined the relevance of this research in several ways. Specifically, through the impact statement, problem statement and considerations outlined in the discussion chapter. These sections help to explain the relevance of my findings to a wide variety of professionals. This has been done to highlight the need to do this at a systemic level by considering the use of my findings for local authorities, EPs and schools.

Further to this, the research has offered an insight into the importance of student voices in the research process and how this can be championed for change in the way in which RSE is delivered.

3.7 Ethical issues

Ethical approval was sought and approved prior to the commencement of this study. The ethical approval form has been completed in line with the BPS ethical guidelines (BPS, 2009). For further approval, this research was approved by the Institute of Education Research Ethics Committee. The full ethics for can be found in appendix 1.

3.7.1 Informed consent

Firstly, informed consent was gained for all participants taking part, including teachers and students. Individualised information letters were sent to all participants which outlined the nature of the study and asked that they give informed consent to participate and to have their voice recorded for the focus groups. Any CYP under the age of 16 had to gain consent from their parent/guardian if they wished to participate.

3.7.1 Right to withdraw

All participants were made aware that at any point in the fieldwork (I.e., during the focus groups) they had the right to withdraw and remove themselves from the research. This meant that any data collected was discarded and not used in the research. They were also made aware that should they wish to opt out of the research once the fieldwork had completed, they also had the right to do so. This information was given to participants in the information sheet and consent forms, as well as having reminders at the end of the fieldwork and collected data.

3.7.2 Confidentiality

This was upheld and maintained to ensure that all the information given by participants was completely private and secure. This was identified clearly in the consent form issued to all participants. To ensure this, participants were made aware of the limits that come with confidentiality and that if the researcher felt any information needed to be passed on for protection or safeguarding issues, it would happen in line with school procedures (E.g., by contacting the designated safeguarding lead). For teachers, there was no mention of their school in the research paper, this ensured no opinions of the school could be traced back, thus securing confidentiality.

3.7.3 Anonymity when reporting findings

Anonymity was also important to consider to ensure privacy for all participants. As this research was using participants (including children under the age of 16) from a primary and secondary school, anonymity was ensured by changing the names of participants if they are mentioned in the research, particularly in the written transcripts. Additionally, the same level of privacy was used for the names of school or Local Authority to ensure they cannot be identified. In addition to this, all participants were given a case number or alternative initials rather than a name. This ensured that no one could identify the participants if they read the final report.

3.7.4 Sensitivity of findings

As there were discussions relating to sensitive topics relating to RSE, there was careful management to deal with them. Some examples of topics included periods, sexuality, rape and pornography. As a trainee educational psychologist, I was able to draw upon my training to manage these topics. I adopted principles of atunement to ensure that I actively engaged with the discussion and validated what each participant has said. It was also important to acknowledge the difficult issues which came up. This happened in a small debrief once the focus group had ended and there was added clarification to ensure that all participants wanted to still be part of

the research. Furthermore, I checked in with teachers after the focus groups had taken place. This meant I could assess how they found the focus groups but also how their students found them.

3.7.5 Secure storage of data

All participants were made aware that the data and information collected are only seen by the researcher or research supervisors. In addition to this, participants may request information relating to the study regarding their information but not anyone else's.

Chapter 4: Findings

In this chapter, findings from the student and teacher focus groups are presented. Firstly, an outline of key information from the selected school is presented. This gives key information about the school's ethos, the pedagogy that they adopt for teaching and the evidence base they use to support this. Several schools were considered for the final part of this research; however, some did not fully meet the criteria and thus the final selected school is the one outlined below.

Secondly, findings from the focus groups are discussed, this was done by first using a within-case study analysis (i.e., analysing the student focus groups separately from the teacher focus groups). Findings are presented by super-ordinate themes and then the sub-themes within each one. The findings are written with illustrative quotes interspersed. This was done as way to create a dialogue of findings in the nature of a conversation rather than it appearing too scripted or impersonal.

The second part of this chapter focuses on the second part of the thematic analysis by exploring cross-case findings to identify similarities or differences between the students and teachers.

All four focus groups were transcribed and analysed to identify codes (the full tables can be found in appendices seven and eight) to draw out common or standout phrases or words linking to key ideas or feelings expressed related to the focus group questions. From these codes, themes were developed based on emerging patterns from all the focus group questions collectively.

4.1 School A key information

School A has been given as the name of the selected school for confidentiality reasons.

School A is an all-through provision located in London. The school consists of a primary, secondary and sixth form with approximately 1200 student on role. There are approximately 150 students per year group. In its most up to date Ofsted inspection report, the school was ranked as 'outstanding'.

Considering the demographics of the school, around 28% of students are eligible for free school meals, which is above the national average. Additionally, 37% of students are eligible for pupil premium funding and the number of students on role who are classified as SEND is lower than the national average.

A mini-Ofsted inspection conducted in March 2022 found that the school had effective safeguarding. With regards to RSE they note that pupils have learned, in age-appropriate ways, about forming healthy and positive relationships with their peers. This includes learning about consent and what constitutes abusive or inappropriate behaviour. The relevancy of this finding from Ofsted illustrates how RSE is a particular strength within the school throughout all phases for the students on role.

The school has adopted several models of pedagogy to reflect its ethos. These methods are evidence-based and are regularly drawn upon to reflect good classroom practice.

Teachers' also have ongoing continuing professional development (CPD) sessions to keep themselves up to date with these methods and to share examples of good practice with each other to ensure there is consistency amongst teachers.

A primary focus at this school is the use of oracy techniques, which are used to develop students thinking and learning. The school acknowledges the importance of good oral communication which can aid analysis and understanding at a deeper level. To develop a deeper understanding, the school uses principles of dialogical teaching. This method requires teachers to change how they talk within the classroom and use purposeful conversations to develop higher order thinking.

4.1.1 The use of oracy

The use of oracy techniques in the classroom exists through all school phases, creating a framework that is broken down into physical, cognitive, linguistic and social and emotional strands. By applying these strands of oracy, the school attempts to create a dialogic classroom. This means that lessons are rich in talk, in which questions are planned, peer conversations are modelled and scaffolded and the teacher uses talk skilfully to develop thinking.

Within each classroom, tables are set up as Harkness tables[1] to facilitate more discussions. The layout of such tables enables a more open and continuing conversation amongst students. By being in a circle, teachers' and students can see those talking and use body language as well as discourse to have a discussion on the topics being presented.

The discussion in class is often facilitated using grounding texts. These are texts selected by students and teachers to allow for more autonomy over learning. They allow students to explore and discuss their feelings around difficult scenarios (such as bullying) without it being about their personal experiences. By using these texts, it can create a distance between students and the subject, giving them a safe space to openly explore it.

With the above in mind, students are given regular opportunities to showcase their developing oracy skills through assemblies, exhibitions, portfolio presentation evenings and placements throughout their time at school. These exhibitions happen at regular points in the academic year and are sometimes graded to add merit to their value of work. It gives students the opportunity to share their work with peers, their parents and carers and other teachers in the school.

4.1.2 Oracy use in the focus groups

It was evident that the use of oracy was demonstrated in the focus groups for both teachers and students. As a group, the participants would use active listening skills to engage with the discussion and they would offer responses which built upon or challenged what others said. It was clear that students were used to being part of a discussion where a culture of oracy is embedded in their everyday learning. For example, they would use debate and discussion phrases such as 'I agree because',

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1 A teaching and learning method involving students seated in a large, oval configuration to discuss ideas in an encouraging, open-minded environment with only occasional or minimal teacher intervention.

'I would challenge this because' and ' I would build upon what person A said, because'.

The use of these oracy techniques did noy only help to keep a continuous flow of conversation in the focus groups, but it also allowed deeper discussions which were reflected and focused on the question being asked – thus meaning that more significant responses were obtained.

The use of oracy is a unique classroom pedagogy at this school and a key factor which supports the enactment of RSE. It is explored further in the discussion chapter of this thesis.

4.2 Within case study findings from student focus groups

The final list of super-ordinate themes and their corresponding sub-ordinate themes can be seen in each table below, a more-detailed table with sub-themes and quotes can be seen in the appendix.

Table 3: A table showing the themes identified in the student focus groups	
Super-ordinate Theme	Sub-Theme
There is a need for a robust school system which supports the enactment of RSE	*Pedagogy of teaching reflects students learning needs; Teaching is embedded as part of a curriculum; A diversity of teachers makes RSE more relevant*
Positive relationships between students and teachers make RSE more accessible to students?	*Increase in interactions between students and teachers; students feel more connected at school*
The content of RSE needs to be delivered positively and also with a combination of biological basics and real-life examples	*Speak on the positives of RSE. and not just the consequences; The use of real-life examples supports the enactment of RSE; The need for relevant topics to be taught*
RSE serves a purpose of supporting CYP transition into adulthood by helping them to make informed decisions	*Preparing students for adulthood; Understanding novel situations; RSE can reduce misinformation*

4.2.1 An overview of identified themes

4.2.2 Theme 1: The need for a robust school system which supports RSE

This was the most popular theme in the student focus groups and was raised a total of 17 times. The theme referred to the school system being integral as a foundation for which good RSE could be enacted to facilitate student learning and engagement.

The sub-themes identified that the pedagogy of teaching reflects students learning needs. These pedagogies are outlined in the key information section of the school. It also found a need to have the teaching of RSE embedded as part of a curriculum, so that it does not feel like a standalone subject being thrown in to meet a criterion. Finally, the diverse make-up of teachers' relating to gender, sexuality and class meant that students found RSE more accessible as there are many teachers they can relate to.

These themes and sub-themes are discussed in more detail below.

4.2.3 Pedagogy of teaching reflects students learning needs

One of the fundamentals that students spoke of related to the pedagogy or the methods of teaching by which teachers plan and enact RSE. It was evident that students responded well to teachers using innovative ways to make RSE more interesting by adapting teaching styles to suit the needs of varying students in their school. For example, this included a shift away from the more traditional methods of PowerPoints and incorporated a mixture of games, real-life scenarios and open discussions. As one student said:

> *"Having games to make it a bit more competitive, good relationships with teachers with real lived experiences, and not making it so regimented and based on PowerPoint slides." (Secondary school student 2, line 177).*

Students also discussed how the school is quite unique in enacting RSE when comparing it to other schools. One secondary school student said, '*I feel like with this school, and having spoken to friends outside of school, it's different here'* and another secondary school built upon this by adding how they think that '*This school has an interesting way of making us remember with games and activities'*. This finding may relate to the embedded pedagogies that the school uses as part of their teaching. The acknowledgment by students shows that students appreciate how this way of teaching is different from other schools and works well for their learning.

From a systemic perspective, students mentioned that the smaller year groups in the school were a positive as it meant that class discussions were easier to facilitate. One primary school student said how '*this school does it differently because our school is small'* with another primary school student saying, '*our school can have RSE with boys or girls together or apart which is good'*. Both comments suggest that the group dynamic of students plays a role in how well RSE is received.

The way by which teachers teach RSE is important. When teachers use different ways to approach topics and make it more accessible for students. The way by which teachers do this is explored in more depth in the teacher focus group analysis. The response of having different approaches in RSE was received very positively, as indicated by one student who said:

> *'I felt like we had fun with it, and we were able to absorb the knowledge as well as not feeling bad about the topics' (Secondary school student 2, line 175).*

4.2.4 Teaching of RSE is embedded as part of a wider curriculum

This sub-theme centred around how RSE is better implemented when it is not taught as a standalone subject or a one-off, but rather as part of the whole year curriculum. One student said that '*RSE goes on throughout the curriculum because it is very much important, and I like that'*. Thus, emphasising how the school does not treat RSE as a separate subject from others but rather as part of a holistic curriculum.

Another student in the secondary school focus group expressed that RSE being part of the everyday curriculum made it feel like RSE was a '*normal'* subject to talk about

as it did not feel like it was being delivered at the last minute or just for a one-off lesson. This student said:

'The curriculum should just be normalised a lot more, because I think quite a lot of the time it can be frowned upon, but I think having RSE regularly makes it more normalised and knowing that sex happens!' (Secondary school student 5, line 85)

This finding reflects concerns outlined in the literature review which highlighted how schools may be cautious to teach elements of RSE as topics may seem 'taboo' or 'unfamiliar'. Students at this school evidently appreciate how RSE is normalised as part of their learning, which may lead to better engagement.

4.2.5 A diversity of teachers makes RSE more relevant

There were several mentions of teacher diversity in the student focus groups. Both sets of students spoke of the benefits of teachers bringing their own life experiences and how having teachers from differing backgrounds, sexualities and genders made RSE more relatable. One secondary student spoke positively of the diversity and the richness that it brings by saying;

'In a sense of how diverse the teachers are. In the school, obviously, we have like a wide range of teachers in terms of race, sexuality, in terms of gender, etc. and a mix of experiences. So, they're able to sort of give us an insight as to what might not actually be in the curriculum.' (Secondary school student 3, 192)

The diversity of teachers bringing real-life experiences also contributes to students engaging with RSE learning. Students in these focus groups mentioned how '*teachers want you to ask questions, because they would rather you be safe than sorry'*. Thus, showing how open questions can lend itself to teachers sharing their own thoughts on certain topics, and motivating students to engage with the content.

Students also discussed the desire to have external people come into their school and teach RSE. Mainly because while their school has teachers from a range of backgrounds, not all teachers can provide the necessary information and, as student 4 said '*We want to listen to a person who's experienced it much more compared to just a single teacher'*.

4.2.6 Theme 2: Positive relationships between students and teachers make RSE more accessible

This was the second-most popular theme that came from the student focus groups. It was discussed a total of 10 times. It emphasised an extension of the school system with a focus on the strong relationships students feel they have with their teachers and, because of RSE, a stronger connection to their peers.

The sub-themes identified that RSE can help to increase better interactions between students and teachers; and that good RSE makes students feel more connected at school.

4.2.7 Increase in interactions between students and teachers

This sub-theme explored how enacting RSE was easier to do when there were foundations of good relationships between students and teachers. These positive interactions between the two meant there were better connections. One student said that the best part they were taught was '*how bonds between friends and mates have changed'.* They discussed that the bonds have enabled students to *'actually comfortably talk about RSE'* and see it as a worthwhile subject with which to engage.

In relation to teacher-student relationships, one student discussed the powerful dynamics they have at the school by saying:

'Teachers and students get along very well, and they know each other on a personal level. So, it means that sometimes teachers, if they feel comfortable, may share personal experiences making it more real. They tell us to always trust your gut feelings and offer advice, instead of it being on slides and it just feels more personal.' (Secondary school student 6, 168)

This type of discussion was highlighted by other students who shared thoughts by saying '*I feel it helps with having a trusted relationship between students and teachers'* and '*I thought the way RSE is done has really put teachers and students together because teachers and students may have been going through the same things.*' Both statements suggest a sense of cohesiveness amongst each other as an important factor to make RSE more relatable.

These positive relationships as a requirement were also felt by those in the primary school focus group, as one put it '*You can also feel like trustworthy of them, because I feel you can speak to a teacher, and they can help you'*. Thus, indicating that the foundation of building trusting relationships early on is imperative in order to ensure students continue to engage with RSE and other subjects in school.

4.2.8 Students feel more connected at school

This sub-theme correlates to the above sub-theme as it is an extension of the trusting relationships that students feel they have with their teachers and how this makes it easier to speak about sensitive topics in RSE.

It also appears that these foundational relationships make students feel more connected to the school system and as a result are more likely to be motivated to engage with their learning in RSE and other subjects. One student emphasised this by stating:

'Teachers say it in a way to make you feel like you don't need to be embarrassed about it or what's about what happens to you, so you don't need to be scared. (Primary school student 2, Line 133).

This was highlighted further by another student who said:

'You can also feel like trustworthy of them, because I feel you can speak to a teacher, and they can help you'. (Primary school student 2, line 134).

It came across from the focus groups that a sense of trust lends itself to students feeling more connected to school. One student said, *'You can feel trustworthy with them, because I feel you can speak to a teacher and they can help you'.* This was said when students were asked about what other schools could do to have a successful enactment of RSE and what would help promote engagement overall.

4.2.9 Theme 3: The content of RSE needs to cover a combination of biological basics and real-life examples

This theme came up a total of 13 times and appeared in most of the questions asked. It focused on what students want to see in an RSE programme when it is being taught. This theme also identified specific topics and how to approach them while being mindful of students' interests and concerns.

The sub-themes highlighted how students want teachers to discuss the benefits or positives of having good RSE and not just give information related to the consequences. Further to this, students found that the use of real-life examples, with the teaching of relevant topics, supported the enactment of RSE as they were able to apply it to their own lives.

4.2.10 Speak on the positives of RSE and not just the negative Consequences

In this sub-theme students discussed how some of the RSE content can be skewed with a particular negative perspective or by focusing on the outcomes of poor RSE by using '*scare tactics'* which can be off-putting for student engagement. One student told me that they '*feel schools should not make it so negative*'. They expressed that negativity can be quite daunting. When asked if some elements of the RSE curriculum could use such scare tactics, all students agreed. Secondary school student 4 added:

'I feel like teachers shouldn't say things like 'don't have sex' because it can happen. I feel it should be more focused on what you should do if you do have sex.'

These conversations focused on how students have awareness of the dangers of poor RSE and that if they feel the content is negative, it could have the adverse effect of making them not want to engage with the content.

Students also discussed a desire to have RSE positivity, with one student saying '*Warn us that at this age that we shouldn't be doing certain things, but don't make it so you wouldn't want to do it in the future*'.

4.2.11 The use of real-life examples supports the enactment of RSE

Students discussed the benefits of using real-life examples or scenarios to make RSE more appealing and how by using this approach it made RSE feel more genuine to them. One student gave a specific example of how real-life scenarios helped him understand novel situations by saying:

'I think another very good part is the real life scenarios. So for example, I never would have thought that I'd get in a scenario where alcohol could be involved in sex or a relationship. But then I learned more about how if you're drunk, then things can go horribly wrong.' (Secondary school student 2, line 68)

The value of using lived experiences to support understanding was spoken about by other students. One student stated that when cartoons or PowerPoints were used it undermined their ability to understand RSE, even though there is an expectation to be mature about the content. As one student put it:

'It's almost like you're treating us like adults by talking about this topic, but you're demeaning us by giving us cartoons.' (Secondary school student 2, line 106)

4.2.12 The need for relevant topics

Students felt that the varying topics in RSE could be refined to reflect more of their needs, interests and concerns. One student stated, '*As a collective, we don't really care about the sex part, but tell us about consent, sexual assault, sexual harassment, and rape'. (Secondary school student 1, line 130).*

A student added more to this by speaking of the need to be taught about more everyday experiences. They said:

'We should know about simple things. Such as if you are going out, like in a club, and you have a drink, don't leave that drink, don't come back to have that drink, because it might be spiked, just get a new one, or just finish it before you go to the toilet'. (Secondary school student 1, line 138).

One secondary school student spoke openly about the need for RSE to reflect a modern society and not to shy away from topics that adults may be unfamiliar with. On the topic of pornography among young people he said:

'I think effects on potentially watching some inappropriate content and how it can affect relationships. So the effects of looking at pornography and material that could obviously have an impact. (Secondary school student 3, line 99)

Students were also openly vocal about how teachers need to cover the topics they want to have and mentioned that instead of *'sugar-coating it because real people have sex'* they want to be taught how to *'prevent issues in a mature way'.*

This highlights that students have a clear understanding of the topics they want to be taught about and that their voice needs to be listened to ensure the content of RSE is relevant to them.

4.2.13 Theme 4: RSE serves a purpose of supporting CYP transition into adulthood by helping them to make informed decisions

This theme was discussed a total of 17 times. There was a consensus that RSE was enabling students to be more informed and prepared as they enter the next phase of their lives and begin to become more autonomous and make decisions that may affect them.

Sub-themes here found that RSE in this school is preparing students for well for adulthood. Specifically, by helping students to understand and prepare for novel situations and by helping to reduce misinformation.

4.2.14 Preparing students for adulthood

There were a lot of discussion points surrounding transition periods, particularly in the secondary school focus group. One student said how RSE was giving students '*that feeling of adulthood and the freedom of speech which is important'.*

Another student mentioned how RSE was preparing them for '*the possible consequences of having sex when you're older*' and '*not saying yes to things that you generally don't want to do*'. *(Secondary school student, line 7).*

It was also evident that students were regularly using their oracy skills to give well-thought of responses. This meant that they would build upon or challenge what was said by other members of the focus group. For example, one student spoke of the importance of RSE and commented that:

'If you didn't get told about RSE and you didn't know what was happening to you, you might think something's wrong. But if you knew, then you'd be able to know how to deal with it.' (Primary School student 1, line 8).

in response to this comment made, one student added:

'Building on to that, I also agree that you need it when you grow older because when it happens to you, you're going to feel like you're not you or you're unique' (Primary school student 4, line 12).

The above demonstrated how part of the pedagogy surrounding oracy and communication are embedded in the school culture. This helped to facilitate a rich discussion by using language skills to convey their agreement.

4.2.15 Understanding novel situations

As part of their learning, students noted how RSE is enabling them to learn about valuable information should they be presented with scenarios they have not encountered before. One quote from a student in the primary school focus group told me that*:*

'RSE prepares you as I know if something happens, say a stranger comes up to me and says 'do you want come to my house'. I think I know not to go because I don't know them. So now I feel more safe'. (Primary school student 3, line 16)

Generally, the secondary school students discussed in detail how RSE *'helps in general to make you be able to be healthier and not so toxic'* with discussions centred around toxicity in relationships and how to deal with it.

Further to this, students added that RSE helps students like themselves to be *'really informed about what to do, and how not to panic',* especially when it comes to knowing how to '*spot when a situation is fishy'.*

Students also found new types of relationships beneficial to learn about as it helps them to '*understand that different life choices for different people'.* Another student built upon this point and said:

'The media portrays that there's only one sort of relationship, like a boy and girl, that's all. But us having RSE, I've learned that there is quite a lot of variation'. (Secondary school student 4, line 22)

Another student built upon this and said:

'I agree. I feel like with RSE, specifically focusing on the relationship part, it opens that question of about sexuality' (Secondary school student 6, line 27).

Again, the use of oracy in the focus group was evident here. Students were using each other a source of support which led to high engagement by all members of the focus group.

Overall, one student summed up the benefits of RSE and how it prepares them for adulthood by saying:

'No matter how old you get, people will be curious and it just eliminates that fact of curiosity because you do know what's going to happen. So it helps people make an informative decision'. (Secondary school student 4, line 15)

4.2.16 RSE can enable students to identify misinformation

Related to the previous sub-theme of preparing students for adulthood once they begin to leave school. Students developed this point by discussing how the purpose of RSE can reduce the high amount of misinformation out there, which they note is relatively easy to find.

One secondary student spoke about how they have learned about things they had little understanding of and that if this learning benefits her then it will no doubt benefit many others. She said:

'I didn't know a woman can do other things to protect themselves as well. I feel like that's what's needed in RSE curriculum, because if I didn't know that, that means there's 1000s of people that don't know.' (Secondary School student 3, line 80)

Students also spoke of being taught about specific topics and how teachers will describe a topic and '*then they show you what it is and you get more from it, as it's more descriptive, and so you get to know them.*'

One primary school student said that:

'RSE helps you to make informed decisions for when you're older, and to not be a bit reckless with your life'. (Primary school student 1, line 5)

They also discussed how RSE can help to shine a light on the misconceptions around differing types of sexuality as RSE '*opens the questions of sexuality and it helps people figure out what they might not be understanding about how they feel'*.

Additionally, there is a safety aspect when it comes to students using misinformation. They feel that teachers can add a personal element to help them understand RSE by being open and non-judgmental. One student put it as:

'With this school, teacher want you to ask questions, because they would rather you be safe than sorry and not use Google as it might not have the answers, but actual humans can.' (Secondary school student, line 186).

4.3 Within case study findings from teacher focus groups

The final list of super-ordinate themes and their corresponding sub-themes can be seen in each table below, a more-detailed table with themes and quotes can be seen in appendices seven and eight.

4.3.1 An overview of identified themes

4.3.2 Theme 1: Seeking student voice and acting upon what they want in an RSE curriculum

Table 4: A table showing the themes identified in the teacher focus groups	
Super-ordinate Theme	Sub-Theme
Seeking student voice and acting upon what they want in an RSE curriculum	*Using a variety of ways to teach RSE; Make RSE part of cross-curricular teaching Create safe spaces to cultivate a positive culture*
Adopt a collaborative approach within teachers to inform best practice	*Seek specialist expertise from EPs or other agencies; Provide teachers will ongoing training*
Good communication between school and home is needed for high levels of engagement	*Have regular meetings with parents for clarity on RSE topics; Have a system where all members of staff have some understanding of RSE*
A tailored curriculum support a successful enactment of RSE	*Pre-emptive work to plan session; Links to real-life scenarios; The use of oracy and language techniques*

This theme was raised a total of 36 times indicating a strong theme through both teacher focus groups. The theme emphasised the need to put a focus on listening to students and acknowledging what they want from an RSE curriculum. This was then followed by careful planning to ensure their voice was acted upon to reflect the curriculum they desired.

The sub-themes highlight how the case study school is using a variety of ways to teach RSE, making RSE more accessible to the diverse learners they have. Further to this, the school makes RSE part of cross-curricular teaching. The findings also showed that the school creates safe spaces to cultivate a positive culture of learning with regards to sensitive topics found within the RSE curriculum.

4.3.3 Using a variety of ways to teach RSE

This was a popular sub-theme and was mainly discussed in the question relating to how teachers deliver sensitive or taboo topics. Teachers spoke about the importance of first gaining student voice and '*listening to what they were hearing about their world*'. With this information, teachers discussed how '*it was then our job to then turn that into what we needed them to understand*'.

By eliciting student voice, it was evident that teachers in this school took that on and adopted teaching strategies that helped to engage students in learning RSE. One teacher said:

> *'I try to develop a multimedia approach to RSE. So it's not just going through reading or going through PowerPoint presentations, it's trying to link that to things that might interest the students.' (Primary school teacher 3, line 145)*

Teachers also frequently discussed the use of grounding texts to support student learning. Most teachers stating that '*grounding texts are important around lots of topics*' and one teacher said how they help students to '*learn through stories and storytelling through different characters*'.

The use of grounding texts, as outlined at the start of this chapter, illustrated the importance of developing a tailored curriculum using a variety of resources to engage and motivate students. This is particularly relevant given the theoretical underpinnings of this research, which focused on understanding motivational factors to support classroom engagement related to RSE.

To thoroughly embed these strategies teachers spoke of how important it was to understand the psychology of relationships. They spoke of sensing that '*students are genuinely interested in being able to understand certain elements of psychology*' and wanting to '*understand certain elements of relationships at a deeper level'*.

4.3.4 Make RSE part of cross-curricular teaching

Teachers indicated that they believed RSE to be successful when it is taught explicitly throughout all of the curriculum over an academic year as opposed to teaching it in one-off sessions or sporadically. For example, one primary school teacher talked about '*covering aspects of sexting within the drama scheme of work'*.

A teacher further highlighted this by saying:

> '*Yes, so just building on that. You'll also have specific assemblies, which might be used to address specific issues, timetabled in*' (Primary school teacher 2, line 11).

Similar to the use of language in the student focus groups, it was evident that the teachers applied their own teaching of oracy into this focus group. This gives a sense of commitment to their pedagogy and also shows that the teachers model how to engage in discussion based topics.

There were conversations about the need to '*develop holistic approaches'* when it comes to teaching students. The idea being that RSE can be seen or applied in other areas and should therefore be part of everyday teaching. One teacher commented on RSE being cross-curricular by saying:

> '*We are responsible for the development of the students within our care and that comes into lots of different areas of the curriculum'. (Primary school teacher 5, line 462)*

Furthermore, there were discussions on how RSE is already being implemented in other subjects and is working well to show links between RSE and other topics. The example given by one teacher was:

> '*I know there are elements of RSE, which are covered within other lesson areas. So for example, I know that in year six, they study aspects of reproduction system of within science'. (Secondary school teacher 2, line 13)*

4.3.5 Create safe spaces to cultivate a positive culture

The data collected highlighted the need to make students feel safe to express themselves in a non-judgmental way by building bonds and positive relationships

with their teachers. There were answers about how it is important that every student feels confident that they *'are going to be supported with whatever they say or might feel silly saying'.*

Further to this, teachers in the focus group felt that delivering RSE was *'about opening up a safe space where everyone feels comfortable'.* This was achieved in a classroom by *'accepting that in that situation you're not an expert on that child's life, you're just guiding them forward and educating them further on whatever the matter is'.*

Teachers gave reasons why creating safe spaces was important, one said it creates a culture where '*we can have those really difficult conversations*' and how RSE is often viewed as an open forum where teachers '*encourage the students are able to have rich discussions'.*

Teachers who were successful in cultivating such spaces spoke about the sense of achievement it gave them and how strong rapport was important to achieve this. One teacher expanded on this by saying:

> *'The most rewarding moments that I can think of within coaching, and within delivering RSE content is when I have had a really good relationship with the students or the class.' (Secondary school teacher 1, line 348)*

One thing that made it easier to create safe spaces was the development of good student-teacher bonds. These good relationships helped students feel more comfortable expressing themselves in front of their peers and teachers. Teachers often did this by bringing lived experiences, taking a non-expert role and being open and honest with students. One teacher said:

> *'I told students, I haven't had the same upbringing you've had, and you haven't had the same upbringing from the person next to you. But none of us need to be experts in order to educate each other and to learn from each other.'*
> *(Primary school teacher 2, line 87)*

While another teacher built on the above quote by adding:

> *'I'm not standing in front of the class and saying 'I've had STIs' but I'm also not sitting there denying anything either'. (Secondary school teacher 3, line 96)*

4.3.6 Theme 2: Adopt a collaborative approach within teachers to inform best practice

The contents of this theme were raised 36 times across both teacher focus groups. It came parallel to the first theme with similarities looking at listening to the voice of teachers as well as students. There was a sense that teachers have a passion to enact RSE, but that this can only be done with transparency, managerial support, and a wide selection of resources.

In the sub-themes here, teachers' spoke often about the benefits of seeking specialist expertise from other agencies to help with the teaching of RSE. The mentioned advice coming from EPs as an example.

They also highlighted the desire to have more training on how to plan and enact the RSE policies. It was also important to have regular consultations with parents for clarity on RSE topics being taught to their children.

4.3.7 Seek specialist expertise from EPs or other agencies

When asked about what could be done to improve RSE, teachers discussed the value of using external agencies to offer insights on how to plan and enact RSE in schools.

Of all the teachers asked, not one had worked with other professionals (such as educational psychologists or sexual health workers), but they did comment on the value that they could bring. One said:

'They've got such a specialty of expertise in terms of knowing relevant and current information about for children's mental health and for what they need to learn in RSE.' (Secondary school teacher 1, line 234)

Another added about the importance of understanding themselves in order to access RSE content, they said:

'I think there's never a space in schools where they shouldn't learn more about themselves, which is obviously what is the focus of everything that you learn in psychology (Secondary school teacher 6, line 250).

4.3.8 Provide teachers with ongoing training

This sub-theme focused on the wish for regular training for teachers and modelling to ensure delivery is done correctly. One teacher spoke about why teachers may not want to deliver RSE by saying:

'That's the other thing that's really important is that one of the other reasons why teachers don't enjoy teaching it is because they're not confident on the knowledge.' (Secondary school teacher 4)

Other teachers discussed how their planning was done by adapting training with those delivering RSE and using the same pedagogies that they would want to see in lessons. This was done to '*model how to encourage a more discursive approach to RSE'* and make it feel easier to deliver. This idea of having informative training led to teachers having open dialogues about their comfortability with delivering RSE. This created opportunities to share concerns and have more '*autonomy rather than just being like, here are the slides go and teach this now'*.

A consensus of the importance of training in RSE can be summed up by one teacher who said:

'Some extra support and training and development on would really support teachers to know exactly what they're listening and looking out for, and then how to support students based on that'. (Primary school teacher 3)

4.3.9 Theme 3: Good communication between school and home is needed for high levels of engagement

The theme explored the need to have strong links between stakeholders in the school system. This included teachers, senior leadership (SLT) teams and parents. It was when these interlinking stakeholders all shared a similar understanding that there were said to be good levels of accountability and a sense of connectedness that enabled students to learn.

The sub-themes showed that teachers' want to have a system where all members of staff have some understanding of RSE so that the teaching can be shared with more numbers of staff, thus spreading the workload. It was also vital to have pre-emptive work to plan sessions and ensure that teachers were confident to deliver the topics. Finally, related to the school's pedagogy, the use of oracy and language techniques was essential when it came to having success with stunt engagement related to RSE.

4.3.10 Have regular meetings with parents for clarity on RSE topics

Parental input was an important theme that emerged in both focus groups. There were discussions about keeping parents involved in all aspects of RSE by having ongoing discussions so parents are informed of what is being delivered to their children as sometimes parents can '*feel really overwhelmed about RSE*'.

Teachers spoke of the need to '*make teachers feel confident and safe to deliver RSE*' by having open conversations with parents to reiterate the plans for how RSE was going to be enacted. Regular communication with parents was seen as a necessity as it meant that RSE in general was normalised as a topic, rather than seen as taboo:

> *'I also think that the fact that we have a lot of relationships, family structures and all that spoken about on a regular basis, those conversations are already normalized now.' (Primary school teacher 5)*

It was also felt to be important that parents were informed of all aspects of RSE and not just informed about sensitive or taboo topics, as this could sometimes create a sense of panic. In secondary schools, teachers discussed how letters are sent home each term to outline what topics are being covered and therefore '*parents are aware, but it's not done in a way that feels like it's unusual or scary or it's controversial*'.

The teachers felt that they had cultivated good relationships with parents in the school. One important aspect of developing these relationships was to have regular meetings between teachers and parents to explain the role of RSE and what to expect from the delivery, which had very positive impacts. One teacher spoke of a meeting with a parent that involved:

> *'Talking them through their sessions and showing them resources and the language that we were going to be using, it really calmed that parent, and then that parent changed their mind and wanted their child to be part of RSE.'*
> *(Primary school teacher 1)*

Having one-on-one meetings seemed to be the preferred way to inform parents as there was a sense that groups of parents '*can have quite a negative group think*'. Therefore, teachers spoke about informing parents individually.

4.3.11 Have a system where all members of staff have some understanding of RSE

Teachers discussed the benefits of having a degree of autonomy in planning and enacting RSE. However, they also discussed the desire to have substantial support from senior leadership teams (SLT) to ensure accountability is for all staff. Currently, the school offers a '*Skelton scheme of work*' and it is up to '*individual teachers and year groups on how they tackled topics*'. On the importance of extra guidance, one teacher said:

'I think having a bit more guidance from SLT or an EP would be very helpful to make sure that we're covering RSE with them and building that into CPD'. (Secondary school teacher 4)

To have high levels of accountability, teachers also felt it was important to be informed of local demographic knowledge to understand the trends and concerns in a local authority and inform practice. For example, this could include knowing the knowing the ethnicity, gender, and class demographics of the area.

'I do think it's really important that you have a really strong local knowledge so that you can support your students in a realistic way rather than just a surface level way'. (Primary school teacher 2)

This level of accountability was also important when considering the involvement of parents. As outlined above, parents could come with anxieties about the content being delivered and thus staff felt there was a need to feel supported should they be met with such scenarios. To have SLT involved in all aspects of RSE meant that:

'If we have to have those conversations with families, SLT should have a grip on the curriculum and be as informed as we are as the teacher who is running it.' (Primary school teacher 1)

Therefore, there was a sense that accountability would mainly come from teachers who would inform parents of what was being taught when it came to RSE. However, there was also a need for a thread of communication from senior leadership teams so that teachers feel supported in delivering such information to parents.

4.3.12 Theme 4: A tailored curriculum supports the successful enactment of RSE

This sub-theme was coded 7 times and was discussed on 17 different occasions. It highlighted the need to have a tailored curriculum that was embedded as part of the whole school system. The case study school adopts some unique ways of working with students which have been used in RSE lessons and are outlined below.

4.3.13 Pre-emptive work to plan sessions

Teachers in the primary focus group in particular felt a key part of enacting a successful RSE curriculum came from the pre-planning of the curriculum and working pre-emptively with students to lay the foundations of expectations.

Teachers discussed how the *'prep work is what makes sessions go really successfully'.* This was opposed to having a PowerPoint or not fully planning

sessions. Whilst this can happen and can work to *'tick a box'* teachers questioned whether students had really understood the content because *'the space wasn't harboured for them to be able to feel comfortable to ask questions or to indulge in the information because you have to run through it so quickly'.*

As part of being pre-emptive, teachers spoke of doing the ground work related to expectations in sessions, ground rules and the nature of what was going to be delivered relating to sensitive topics. They felt this was vital to creating a culture of respect amongst their peers. One teacher said:

'Ensuring that they know there are things that are okay to say or ask questions or disagree respectfully with someone. It is challenging to set up, but when you do get it right, it is really magical.' (Primary school teacher 5)

4.3.14 Links to real-life scenarios

There were meaningful discussions linked to the necessity of making RSE more accessible to students by ensuring that the delivery of content is relevant to them and their needs. Teachers discussed how you can deliver RSE through lessons and in that specific environment it can feel easy to do, however there is a need to be able to apply that into everyday situations.

'In the lesson they can talk hypothetically about all these feelings and emotions and conflicts, but then being able to use that and apply that to real situations outside of the classroom. That's when it's felt really rewarding.' (Secondary school teacher 6)

One teacher spoke of using real-life scenarios to externalise the issue, this way '*the students find it easier and safer to talk about it, when you're giving advice to other people'.* Another teacher added to this by agreeing with externalising it first and then bringing personal lived experiences to make it more realistic. They said:

'I agree, externally first before going straight to your own personal experiences, that can feel quite exposing and they kind of immediately can get quite defensive.' (Primary school teacher 6)

4.3.15 The use of oracy and language techniques

The school adopts specific speaking and discussion pedagogies to facilitate conversations within lessons. This is known as '*using oracy'* in school and helps to develop a more discursive pedagogy.

I would say the main strategies that we use are mostly wellbeing assemblies, and they mostly underpin oracy techniques. so that in the children's interest to explore different themes, kind of different moral themes within relationship.' (Secondary school teacher 3)

Teachers use dialogic talking to focus on how the right kind of talking can lead to better thinking and better understanding. It is this approach which is used in lessons so that children can facilitate conversations and discussion on the topics they are learning. This was seen in the focus groups by teachers who model the language

they want to see, such as '*I want to build upon what was said'* or '*I would challenge this because'.*

The techniques are used throughout form time, lessons and are also part of RSE lessons. Teachers discussed how by using oracy techniques can encourage students to be:

'Self-reflective through things like journaling or through conversations with that the large group and conversations with smaller group.' (Secondary school teacher 3)

4.4 Across case study exploration: Similarities from both students and teacher focus groups

A cross-case synthesis was used to further analyse the separate focus group data. The analysis was based on comparing the themes and sub-themes between student and teacher focus groups and analysing if there were commonalities or differences. The full table of colour-coded themes can be found in appendix 10.

Interestingly, there was a significant overlap in sub themes from both sets of participants which have been ordered into three cross referenced themes. This information then gave an idea of overarching themes for the successful enactment of RSE across the whole school, these are outlined and discussed below.

4.4.1 Theme 1: Positive relationships with all stakeholders

It was evident from both sets of participants that good relationships were integral in order to enact good RSE in school. This was the most frequently mentioned theme in all of the focus groups. Students discussed the benefits of positive relationships with their own peers and by extension their teachers. Teachers discussed the benefits of having good relationships with their colleges as well as building bonds with their students.

The positive relationships could be identified as a continuous cycle between teachers, students, and parents. With this cycle, each stakeholder acts as a voice that can contribute to aspects of learning and the curriculum. By having close links between each stakeholder there is a perception of cohesiveness which means parents are more likely to opt their child into RSE.

From a teacher-student perspective, this close bond means that students feel better connected to their teachers, which makes them more motivated to engage with all aspects of RSE learning.

4.4.2 Theme 2: A tailored curriculum

The second most frequent theme has been categorised as the need to develop a tailored curriculum that meets the needs of students. This involved the use of student voice to make sure that they were getting what they want from an RSE curriculum.

By not only promoting the use of gaining student voice but also actively acting upon it, it gives students more of an incentive to participate and engage with RSE learning.

The focus groups showed that students feel valued when their voice is listened to. However, just as important as this was teachers' acknowledging that they can gain a lot from understanding their voice as it can inform their planning of the RSE curriculum.

From a teacher's perspective, it was also notable that a tailored curriculum was important to give teachers' a sense of competence in their planning and delivery. By having some autonomy and being flexible in planning their curriculum, while still adopting the school's pedagogies, teachers' feel more confident in teaching RSE, including the teaching of sensitive topics that many may feel less inclined to teach.

4.4.3 Theme 3: Pre-emptive organisation

The third and final theme emerging from both students and teachers is the need for organisations to lay sufficient groundwork in order to be in the best position to enact RSE.

Teachers' feel the need to have lots of pre-planning when it comes to the RSE curriculum. This type of planning needs to include seeking specialist advice from external agencies to give teachers' confidence that they are planning the curriculum correctly. The findings also found that there is a need for ongoing training to stay up-to-date with current policies and what topics are relevant in RSE to be teaching.

Finally, there is the need to have adopted the use of evidenced based school pedagogies (such as oracy) to inform how RSE is being taught. These approaches add clarity to expectations of what is being taught in RSE and how to do it. It also gives a level of consistency amongst teachers to support them in enacting topics in RSE, this was highlighted as a challenge in the literature review.

While this theme primarily came from a teacher's perspective, it nonetheless impacts on students. As the ones who will receive teaching in RSE, they directly benefit from the pre-emptive planning that teachers' and other professionals do.

4.4.4 Across case study exploration: Differences from both students and teacher focus groups

Notably, there were only minor differences across all focus groups. This suggests a good level of harmony amongst teachers and students in each of the school phases.

The main difference between primary and secondary students came from the focus on age-appropriate information being taught in RSE. For example, primary school students mainly discussed friendship development and how to make peer connections as well as the beginnings of puberty and what to expect. Whereas secondary school students spoke about the importance of being taught about their preparation for adulthood, how to navigate romantic relationships and wanting information relating to sexual relationships.

The key difference between teachers in primary and secondary schools was the involvement of parents as students got older. Teachers' in the primary school focus groups discussed an emphasis on having parents informed along each step of the way with regards to planning RSE and the topics being delivered. Comparably, teachers in the secondary school focus groups spoke more about autonomy and the

focus being on providing relevant and necessary information to students with parental concerns coming second to student concerns.

4.5 Reflexivity from the findings

As the researcher who facilitated the focus groups, it was necessary to reflect on the findings, which helped inform the discussion chapter.

I found in each of the student focus groups that participants spoke with a sense of criticality and were very used to being part of open discussions. This means they were used to questioning one another and used approaches that were embedded in the school, as part of the school's ethos, to contribute to the focus group dynamic. This meant that there were rich discussions and a sense of ease when it came to drawing information from students regarding RSE. It was after these focus groups that I recognised how the use of oracy, and discussion based strategies in the classroom, was pivotal in engaging students.

There were similar findings in the teacher focus groups. Teachers themselves used the oracy approaches that they use with their students. It was evident that these approaches are adopted by teachers and filter through into the classroom. This helps to create a holistic approach where everyone in the system is using the same resources and pedagogy for learning.

These findings helped to shape a focus on what can be done to give examples of good practice and are explored more in the next chapter.

Chapter 5. Discussion

This chapter evaluates the findings outlined in the previous Chapter by focusing on the research questions presented in Chapter two, which arose from the findings of the literature review. The questions answer how the case study school in this research has implemented RSE but also outlines implications for transferability so that others school can see how RSE can also be implemented in their own schools.

The chapter continues to outline key recommendations for good practice that can be used in other schools other than the case study school used in this research. This is done by understanding the local authority context and how EPs can play a role in transferring these findings.

Finally, the chapter discusses any strengths and limitations that have arisen in the research and what could be done for future research in a similar area of interest. This is followed by concluding comments which reflect on the piece of work as a whole.

The theoretical framings outlined in Chapter 1, have been used throughout this chapter. This means that the questions have attempted to be answered by understanding how they can be applied in a systemic way to schools (drawing upon Bronfenbrenner) and how they can be applied to the individual at the heart of the system (self-determination theory).

5.1 **Research question 1:** What strategies and approaches are schools currently using to implement a good RSE curriculum?

The literature review highlighted that schools in general are not always taking student voice into account and often adopt a teacher led approach when delivering RSE.

In comparison, the case study school that participated in this research has adopted its own unique ethos and evidence-based approaches which have contributed to success with the implementation of a good RSE curriculum. The approaches used are well ingrained throughout the school phases from reception through to sixth form. They influence the adopted pedagogies within the school and teachers are regularly trained regularly on how to use and implement them into everyday teaching.

The variety of approaches has been outlined in the school information section at the beginning of Chapter four. The following approaches discussed in this chapter are used in the school as the main approaches and have been selected as they relate to the findings from the focus groups and the outlined theoretical framework in chapter two. These approaches outlined can be used in other schools to have some success with RSE.

5.1.2 The use of oracy and dialogical teaching

The main approach used in the case study school to support this culture and implement good RSE comes from the use of oracy strategies. While oracy strategies are not in place to directly support just RSE, they are embedded as part of the whole school system and thus are used when teaching RSE.

Themes from the focus group findings highlighted the importance of a tailored curriculum that was conducive to students' needs. The use of oracy was identified as a way by which the curriculum could be tailored in order to facilitate the deepening of discussions and embed opportunities to use language in the classroom.

The use of oracy strategies derives from dialogic teaching. This is where teachers constantly evaluate the classroom relationships being fostered, address the balance of power between teacher and student and understand the way we conceive knowledge (Alexander, 2008). The research into this strategy focuses on the relationship between language, learning, thinking and understanding (Alexander, 2008).

Students and teachers are well-informed about how to use such approaches, which are part of the everyday school culture. This helps to support the implementation of a curriculum for a wide variety of students. The focus groups used as part of this research reflected such approaches. Students in particular were used to the focus group dynamic which meant sitting around a table, having an open discussion on a topic and giving opinions and thoughts on RSE.

Students and teachers also use specialist terminology, already used in the school, to facilitate rich discussions. This includes terms such as '*building upon'* to show that they agree with what has been said and would like to add a further point. Using the word '*challenging*' to indicate that students have acknowledged what has been said but want to disagree with a point made by other students and offer an alternative counterpoint. These, among other terms, give students a critical starting point that they can use to enable rich conversations as part of their learning.

By using dialogical techniques in the classroom, students are taught to not only provide responses to test and recall questions. Instead, they learn to narrate, explain, analyse, evaluate and discuss information so that they are active in their learning and have a deeper understanding of information.

It was evident in the focus groups in this research that this strategy worked well to support the facilitation of a good group discussion. Students, particularly in the secondary focus group, gave rich answers with a level of maturity to their responses. It was clear that they expressed themselves and respected alternative viewpoints from their peers. This led to a fruitful discussion on sensitive topics in RSE and gave a better understanding of what they wanted to see in an RSE curriculum. This was also seen in the teacher focus groups when teachers used the same techniques to answer questions.

It may be that this shared strategy of creating dialogical classrooms for teachers' and students, through the use of oracy, contributes to higher levels of confidence in teaching RSE. This could be because the oracy techniques act as a framework to facilitate discussions, making students and teachers' more accustomed to having regular debates, open forums and discourse on topics in RSE. The NSPCC (2019), for example, found in a poll of more than 2,000 teachers that 47% felt they lacked confidence. Thus, a strategy such as oracy and dialogical classrooms, may be one that can support the implementation of an RSE curriculum.

The dialogical framework can also be applied across all parts of the curriculum and in each phase. The versatility of such an approach means that those using it can implement it into any lesson with relative ease and can thus be used as a teaching

method to support higher order learning. Therefore, this finding about using oracy techniques in the classroom has high levels of transferability to other schools that may not be currently using such methods.

5.1.3 Students as active participants in their learning

A second way in which approaches support the implementation of a good RSE comes from treating students as active participants in their learning and thus adopting a student-centred approach. The case study school actively seeks to elicit student voice as many opportunities as possible. This was illustrated in the focus groups, where both students and teachers' discussed being included in forums, using online platforms to get student views and teachers having regular meetings with students to gain their perspective on topics.

Not only do they seek student voice, they also act upon it to shape and tailor the curriculum to meet their needs. The act of listening to student voices was reflected in the focus groups where students felt valued and seen. However, they do not reflect the findings from the literature review where student voice may not always be a priority (Sex Education Forum, 2021).

The use of student voice and acknowledging students as active participants in their learning is part of the Relationships, RSE and Health Education (RSHE) guidance (2019). This guidance states that schools should develop a policy that reflects the views of both teachers and pupils. They outline that listening to and responding to the views of young people will strengthen the policy.

Eliciting student voice may also be a beneficial strategy to use as it could lead to increased motivation for students to participate in their learning (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012). By using student voice, schools are developing intrinsic motivators (i.e. motivators that come from inside an individual and include internal factors such as personal reward). As a result of moving towards more intrinsic motivators, students start to perceive their actions as self-determined and thus become more motivated to engage with learning (Toshalis and Nakkula, 2012).

The self-determination theory outlined in Chapter one supports the notion that students need to feel motivated in order to engage with learning (Deci & Ryan, 1985). This is supported by research that has shown how using student voice can lead them to feel empowered, able to construct their own meaning from information they are given and value their education (Laux, 2018). Further to this, students can feel a sense of competence when they know that their voice is being acted upon (Conner and Nsowaa, 2022). Through implementing their ideas or acknowledging that the views they have offered are valid, it can foster a sense of effectiveness and achievement (Conner and Nsowaa, 2022). This is vital if RSE is to be implemented well as the sensitive topics require high levels of engagement to ensure that students leave RSE with a good understanding.

The benefits of using student voices can be seen in the present research. The school elicits student voice through the use of surveys, student ambassadors and general ongoing conversations. The school then uses these voices to support planning and teaching. In the context of RSE, students know what they want to be taught and what information they want to have in order to feel prepared for adulthood and beyond.

When schools, such as in this case study, promote and use student voice, they are seeing students as active participants in their learning, with a voice to say or suggest what they want in a curriculum. As a result, students learning experiences are enhanced as they feel appreciated and thus engagement with RSE is also enhanced.

5.2 **Research question 2:** How can examples of good practice be applied to other schools?

Many examples of good practice were found in the case study school. While in many ways they could be seen as unique to the school's ethos, the foundations and evidence on which they are based can be applied to a variety of settings.

5.2.1 Developing positive relationships with stakeholders

An overarching theme that emerged from the focus group findings was the development of positive relationships between students, teachers' and parents. Students discussed how good relationships with their teachers fostered an open and supportive environment whereby students felt there was a high level of comfortability when it came to sharing information and feeling connected at school.

Additionally, teachers discussed how they want to have good relationships with parents as it is deemed a necessity to have them on board when teaching RSE and sensitive topics. While parents were not included in the research, the literature review found that parents had some conflict over concerns about what their children are being taught in RSE but also wanting their children to be safe and informed on RSE related topics. Therefore, the relationship between each stakeholder is important to consider when offering examples of good practice in schools.

The findings from the focus groups reflect research that supports the importance of developing positive relationships in education as a way to get the most from stakeholders, such as students, teachers and parents. When referring back to the self-determination theory, a sense of belonging or connectedness is one of the three factors needed in order to be motivated and self-determined. Allen, Slaten, Arslan, Roffey, Craig and Vella-Brodrick, (2021) state that this sense of belonging can come from the positive relationships developed in school. By having these positive relationships students feel more motivated to engage with learning (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

In the context of RSE, as noted in the literature, schools can often be challenged by parents on the topics of RSE being taught (Hilton, 2021) It may therefore be necessary for other schools to develop good practice by ensuring that they are developing more positive relationships between teachers and parents as a way to bridge these connections and hope to develop more harmonious dynamics between each stakeholder to implement RSE successfully. One way this has been done is through the use of parent forums and regular information being sent home to inform parents of what will be done during RSE lessons.

Schools therefore need to find and adopt better ways of promoting positive relationships between teachers and students. The present case study school has success in doing this by valuing the individuality of each student and building a sense of trust and rapport in order to create reciprocal exchanges between the two. This helps increase students' engagement with their learning.

5.2.2 Developing positive relationships between students

While student-teacher relationships are important, there is also a need to ensure that developing relationships occur between student to student. Wehmeyer, Cheon, Lee and Silver (2021) highlight how relationships among students also matter as they create a sense of affiliation and peer network support.

The importance of student-student relationships came up in the findings of this research. Students in both primary and secondary schools noted how well RSE has helped them feel more connected to both their peers and teachers. This may be because they often share what may be considered personal information relating to socially sensitive topics, but also because they are all going through the topics that arise in RSE (e.g. friendship dynamics, puberty and romantic relationships, etc.).

The finding therefore emphasises an important aspect of developing positive relationships holistically as part of good practice which helps to support the facilitation of RSE.

5.2.3 Adopt systemic frameworks to support student learning

With the above in mind, it could be deemed appropriate to adopt a systematic view to promote such relationships (Bronfenbrenner, 2005). This would mean applying Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory and ensuring that stakeholders consider the dynamic process between the individual (i.e. the student) and the microsystem (e.g. family and school) and bridge the gaps by understanding the interactions between these two systems (connections between the mesosystem). For example, in the context of RSE, it would mean understanding how parents connect with their teachers at school and vice versa, but also understanding how each of these two systems interacts with the student.

By applying Bronfenbrenner's system theory in schools, and applying it specifically to RSE, Hayes, O'Toole and Halpenny (2022). argue that such an approach can act as a responsive framework that can enhance student learning. It can give teachers and other professionals a standpoint from which to evaluate how best to support the individual in the middle of the system.

This has been seen in the present case study. Teachers in the focus groups discussed how involvement with parents or carers was crucial as part of best practice in order to get the most from their students. By keeping parents informed at each stage (i.e. what topics are being taught and when) the school finds that there is more parent and student engagement shown by fewer parents opting out of RSE and more students sharing information with parents at home (as seen in the primary school student focus groups). The school therefore adopts a systemic approach when considering the implications of planning and teaching RSE, by ensuring that the systems directly around the child are well-informed.

5.2.4 Use oracy techniques as part of everyday learning

Oracy techniques as part of everyday school culture and using them cross- curricular in all subjects should be part of good practice in schools.

Presently, oracy techniques are only being adopted in some subjects and are only being used by a minority of teachers (Millard & Menzies, 2016). In fact, many studies

show that discourse in the classroom is primarily monologic, meaning the classroom is teacher-led where the ideas and voices of teachers' come first (Reznitskaya and Gregory, 2013). However, even though it has been argued that use of dialogical teaching techniques is effective for student learning, teachers can also find it hard to implement (Van de Pol, Brindley and Higham, 2017).

There may be several reasons for this as outlined by Millard & Menzies (2016). Firstly, they found that some teachers believe that oracy techniques are only applicable in some subjects, primarily in the subject of English. Second to this, they found that teachers' lack of confidence and expertise, exacerbated by limited opportunities for training, mean they may not always feel comfortable using oracy in the classroom.

Millard & Menzies (2016) also found that schools do not consistently provide meaningful opportunities for pupils to develop oracy outside the classroom. In contrast to this, the school case study in this research has embedded oracy as part of its everyday culture, through classroom lessons, assemblies, exhibitions and across all phases from 4-18 years old.

The school also regularly trains teachers on how to use oracy through its CPD programme, which helps them share examples of how to refine oracy skills in the classroom. This was evident in the findings from the teacher focus groups. Teachers discussed training on how to teach RSE and how the curriculum with their students applies what they receive as part of their CPD. Teachers also used oracy skills themselves in the focus group and mentioned how they model what they expect to see in their classrooms.

5.3 Research question 3: From a teacher's perspective, what factors are creating effective ways of implementing good quality RSE?

This question attempted to uncover what can be done to support the teachers in schools who are planning and implementing RSE. The factors derived from the discussions in the focus groups and relate well to what teachers and other stakeholders outlined as concerns for difficulties when it comes to implementing RSE, as discussed in the literature review.

5.3.1 Having support for leadership teams

The teacher focus groups demonstrated the need to have sufficient support from the senior leadership team (SLT) as a contributing factor to developing and teaching good quality RSE. As a role in schools, SLT are responsible for implementing strategies to support school improvement, thus they play a key role when considering the overall school's performance.

Millard & Menzies (2016) found that a lack of active support from school leadership teams can contribute to teachers feeling unsure or uncomfortable with using strategies or approaches to support their teaching, particularly when it comes to using oracy in the classroom. Therefore, there is a need for support to filter down from higher levels down to classroom teachers to implement RSE.

Several teachers echoed this in this focus group and stated that more input from SLT would be beneficial to feel supported in order to feel that what they are doing is correct in their approach to teaching RSE. In addition to this, some teachers

discussed wanting to have SLT members as backup should they come across challenging situations from parents.

Having back up support is a response to a key finding from the literature review, that parental conflict can arise with the prospect of teaching RSE. Parents have noted their concerns over what topics are being taught, age-appropriate materials being given and how sensitive topics are being raised in the curriculum (Department for Education, 2019). This demonstrates that teachers needing to feel they have support behind them is a strong contributing factor when it comes to success with the enactment of RSE.

A positive effect of having support from SLT with clearly defined roles is that it can contribute to better well-being for teachers (Lummis, Morris, Ferguson, Hill and Lock, 2022). When schools have leadership teams who are involved in the planning of curriculums and use the school teacher teams to also lead in some areas (e.g. lead in RSE) there can be overall school improvement (Muijs and Harris, 2006).

The case study school appears to have a clear structure of phases, a defined role for those in positions of management and clarity of expectations for such roles (E.g. curriculum leader, SLT, head of year, etc.). This can again contribute to effective ways of implementing RSE and is something that can be adopted in other schools.

5.3.2 Allow teachers to have a sense of autonomy

While support from those higher up is important to have, there was also a need to have a sense of autonomy when it comes to planning and teaching RSE. When teachers have support in place, paired with the autonomy to plan and prepare RSE in their schools, they feel more competent in what they are teaching and as a result have more self-efficacy (Skaalvik, and Skaalvik, 2014). This perception of self-efficacy is an important factor that can contribute to predictors of engagement, job satisfaction, and emotional exhaustion (Skaalvik, and Skaalvik, 2014), thus making it an important factor to consider for other schools.

The need for autonomy relates to the underpinning framework of the research which outlined the application of self-determination theory. While the relevance of this theory was primarily applied to students it can also be applied to teachers, as they need to feel self-determined in their role. Creating opportunities for teachers to develop their autonomy can lead to teachers' having more ownership over what they do, which in turn can help increase motivation. A feeling of autonomy is felt in the case study school. Teachers have the opportunity to use and create their own resources, liaise with other members of staff to plan and have a flexible approach when teaching RSE.

5.3.3 Adopt collaborative approaches with all stakeholders

Another factor that supports the effective implementation of RSE is for schools to develop a holistic and collaborative approach among all stakeholders. Presently, as outlined in the literature review, there may be some difficulties when implementing RSE as there is discord between stakeholders. This may be as parents are misinformed, students are not always listened to, and teachers have other pressures that may take priority.

Nonetheless, the collaborative link between student-teacher-parent needs to be a strong one where everyone's voice is being heard and acted upon. By fostering strong links between stakeholders, there is a sense of connectedness. This was one of the key principles needed in order to feel motivated as outlined by the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

Incidentally, this collaborative approach has been highlighted in the research. Sutton and Shouse (2016) for instance comment on schools being collaborative with other stakeholders as integral to their practice. They further explain that schools will inevitably have similar difficulties and thus when there are problems that need to be solved, collaboration can be seen as vital.

The case study in this research evidently has a positive approach to collaboration with all stakeholders. They elicit student voice, teachers' needs are being addressed and parents are being consulted. This fosters a sense of teamwork which has influenced the planning of RSE. It also creates a culture that emphasises RSE as a responsibility for all of those involved and works by being effective as it promotes a sense of togetherness.

Through working together, the school has many parents on board for RSE and students feel there is value to what they are being taught

5.3.4 Ongoing continuing professional development training

One final factor derives from well-developed continuing professional development (CPD) and training for teachers needed for effective implementation of RSE. In the teacher focus groups, teachers discussed having some training relating to RSE, but they also discussed the desire to have more and to have it as ongoing throughout the academic year.

Relevant to this finding, Cummings, Fisher, Reilly-Chammat (2021) found that there is a need for ongoing professional development to broaden teachers' understanding of RSE. They further note how not having such specialised training in RSE can act as a barrier to successful implementation.

Teachers in this present research also referred back to their own teacher training experiences and discussed how ill-equipped they felt when it came to delivering subjects such as RSE. This reflects the need for teachers to have good quality training, perhaps going back to their initial teacher training course, in order to become efficient with using effective pedagogies which can support educator capacity and their self-belief in teaching RSE (Cummings, Fisher, Reilly-Chammat, 2021).

Nonetheless, the school in this case study does offer a robust CPD programme that runs regularly through tailored modules and has designated specialist staff leading various sessions that reflect the needs of the school. This has been shown to be effective when it comes to RSE as teachers feel their CPD is responsive and proactive.

5.4 Research question 4: What do key stakeholders want in an RSE curriculum in order to feel it is beneficial to them?

This question wanted to explore what stakeholders in schools collectively want when it comes to implementing RSE and making it beneficial, namely parents, teachers and students. There were commonalities between stakeholders discussed below which, again, reflected some of the literature outlined in Chapter 2.

5.4.1 Keeping stakeholders informed

One of the key standout findings from the focus groups was that each stakeholder wanted to be well-informed at each step of the way when it came to planning and implementing an RSE curriculum. Teachers' discussed the importance of informing parents and students wanted to be part of the planning process to make the curriculum relevant to them. Thus creating a cycle of information for each stakeholder throughout the process of planning RSE.

Government policy surrounding RSE has indeed outlined the need to keep all stakeholders informed along the way of planning and implementing of RSE. One standout policy highlights the use of consultation to support such communications (Department for Education, 2019). This policy further adds that schools need to '*recognise the importance of strong, constructive and open conversation with parents in the education of their children*' (Department for Education, 2019). The extent to which this is always done is not fully known, but nonetheless the approach is promoted and needs to be acknowledged in order to make RSE beneficial to everyone involved. This can be explored when considering RSE from each stakeholder's perspective.

To be successful in implementing RSE, teachers want to be informed by senior leadership that what they have planned is sufficient to prepare young people for the real-world. Teachers' in the focus groups discussed the desire to have direct links with senior management when it comes to planning RSE content. This could relate to teachers' being mindful of accountability measures in schools.

Indeed, schools can be judged by Ofsted on their RSE teaching and thus if there are teachers' in the school who are RSE leads, it would suffice to have regular checks to ensure that RSE is being planned and taught to a good standard. When considering SLT, teachers' expressed how they can offer guidance on what is being taught.

Furthermore, teachers also want to inform parents and carers about the curriculum as a way to support engagement and increase the opt-in rates for student's participation. Jewett (2020) discusses in their research how parental consultation with regards to RSE is vital should schools want to build stronger school-home partnerships. They also note how informing parents regularly helps to fulfil government policy requirements and can support meeting criteria outlined by Ofsted (Jewett, 2020).

From a student's perspective, they want a voice in the making of an RSE curriculum and to feel that their needs and wishes are being heard and acted upon. Students need to feel valued when it comes to their learning and they feel this can be done by informing teachers what they want in a curriculum. The school in this case study recognises this and takes advantage of obtaining student voice to influence their planning of the RSE curriculum.

The use of student voice to make RSE feel beneficial to them draws upon the outlined epistemological stance in Chapter 3. By eliciting student voices, the school

is attempting to understand their perspectives on their own reality and implement these perspectives into the RSE curriculum.

5.4.2 Developing a tailored curriculum

The two main stakeholders in this research (students and teachers) also want a tailored RSE curriculum to meet the needs of young people based on age-appropriate material. This means adapting the RSE curriculum to use a variety of resources and tailoring it based on students wishes.

A tailored curriculum has been well highlighted in the research. UNESCO (2017), for instance, outlines the need for diversity within a curriculum which can help to engage students by building on their interests and passions.

Additionally, some assert that personalised and tailored learning is the needed 'mass customisation' of learning (Hargraves, 2005). meaning that each learner has a need to become an active and engaged learner supported by the customisation of a curriculum that is adjusted to the diverse make up of all students (Hargreaves, 2005).

This has been further highlighted in additional research. Schleicher (2018), for example discusses how the future of learning in schools is based on personalising educational experiences. They argue this can be done by developing curriculums that derive from student passions. Again, their rationale behind this is to support student engagement with their learning so that it feels valuable to them (Schleicher (2018).

5.4.3 Use external agencies for extra support

A final outcome from the focus groups indicated that students and teachers' feel the use of external agencies would benefit them by contributing to success in implementing RSE.

In the teacher focus groups, none of the participants had worked with external agencies, such as EPs for example, but they welcomed the idea of using such specialist support. Teachers' discussed the usefulness of other agencies to check their planning for the RSE curriculum and to offer some quality control before teachers teach the content.

Similarly, students discussed how they would like external agencies to teach RSE. They reflected on the use of other professionals to provide RSE related information as a positive. These findings from the student focus groups reflect my own project outlined in Chapter 1, a project which focused on using student voice to understand what they feel is needed in an RSE curriculum. Overwhelmingly, students spoke of the desire to have external agencies (such as a sexual health advisors) to offer impartial advice and to have a boundary between students and teachers'.

These findings give the impression that students express some discomfort with their subject teachers delivering RSE topics (such as sexually transmitted infections or sexually related topics) and then also teaching their main subject. Students felt that external agencies could take away some embarrassment that they may feel on such sensitive topics. Therefore, the use of external agencies is a beneficial in creating a more comfortable environment to implement RSE.

5.5 Recommended good practice

The following section outlines suggested recommendations of how to implement RSE, when considering examples of good practice in schools. The recommended good practice can be divided into examples relevant to a local authority (linked to Government policy), individual schools and what can be done by educational psychologists (EPs).

5.5.1 Local authority (LA) considerations

- LAs should be familiar with the policies and laws surrounding RSE and be able to distinguish between what is compulsory and what is not with regards to age-appropriate topics. The policies outline what schools have to do in RSE and thus a high degree of familiarity is necessary to always be informed. This is particularly important when the literature has highlighted that some parents want clarity on what needs to be taught. By having LAs informed on policies it can act as a framework to support schools in their legal obligations to students with regards to RSE teaching.

- LAs should ensure it is a priority to develop partnerships with stakeholders. This includes the need to be a strong source of support for all schools. The fostering of positive relationships between students, teachers and parents is essential to ensuring that a sense of trust and security is built. Students respond well to this as they feel valued and parents feel better about their associations with the school. When LAs can help cultivate positive cycles of relationships between each stakeholder, it can help increase engagement and motivation for all of those involved. This would include regularly sharing information between:
    - Parents
    - Students
    - Teachers and SLT

    This is necessary when it comes to teaching RSE to increase opt-in rates and have successful outcomes as students' progress through each school phase.

- On a wider scale, LA can help schools work systematically as part of everyday practice. This research has thus far highlighted the importance of working closely together with teachers, parents and students and thus relates to adopting the use of the Eco-Systemic Model proposed by Bronfenbrenner (1979). Taking an Eco-systemic approach is a way of acting, thinking, and viewing the world of an individual by recognising interlinking relationships that are embedded in their social environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Therefore, by understanding that the relationships of each system influence each other, one can understand that changes in one part of a related system can have an impact or change on another related system.

5.5.2 School considerations

- Schools would benefit from adopting a systemic approach when trying to implement dialogical approaches. This would mean that the foundations of the school system follow some kind of dialogical teaching. This would mean adapting schemes of work to ensure that discussion is threaded throughout

the curriculum and assessment in each subject. Further to this, teachers would need ongoing training to first understand how dialogical approaches can be used in the classroom and then how to ensure they are being done well.

- It would be beneficial for schools to adopt dialogical approaches in their classrooms. The use of such approaches helped to facilitate discussion by building students repertoires of language and communication skills. Examples of using dialogical approaches can range from having debates in class on certain topics to regularly using reciprocal questioning between teacher and students. The use of dialogical approaches, including oracy techniques, can be applied as a whole school approach and can be applied to the majority of subjects. When schools embed dialogical teaching into their everyday learning it helps to create a culture of more effective learning.

- One of the fundamental aspects of work for schools, that is integral to the profession, is promoting the voice of CYP. Outlined in the Special and Educational Needs Code of Practice (2015) the legislation advocates the importance of professionals establishing and representing the views of CYP as a paramount objective. The relevance of this to RSE is that if this objective is to be achieved there is a need to elicit the voices of CYP and make sure that they are heard by the people around them. Therefore, schools need to regularly promote, elicit and use student voice as part of their curriculum planning. It is imperative that students are seen as active learners, who can also contribute to what they want in their curriculum by offering their own opinions and viewpoints. Schools should consider multiple ways in which student voice can be gained at different stages of their learning. Notably, surveys, student councils, ambassadors and student project learning have all been successful examples of obtaining student voice. These methods can be applied in other schools and can be used with students of all ages.

- Schools will benefit from developing a tailored curriculum in RSE in order for learning to be more personalised for students. This can be developed when the above point is acted upon as the student voice will inform how RSE should be taught. Schools can use this information to create a personalised curriculum that reflects the needs and wishes of students. The tailored curriculum should of course still implement Government expectations with regards to compulsory RSE topics, but the way in which topics are taught (e.g. other agencies or methods of teaching) can be used in ways that are deemed appropriate by individual schools.

5.5.3 Educational psychologist's considerations

- When considering what EPs can offer in the development of the new RSE curriculum, it can be said that they offer a distinctive psychological perspective to understand and inform human behaviour, particularly related to CYP (Boyle, 2016). Indeed, the British Psychological Society (BPS) has contributed their psychological knowledge and expertise in response to the Governments outline of the new RSE. They raised concerns about parents having the right to withdraw and concerns about teachers taking on the

responsibility to deliver RSE. They note that it would be beneficial to include health professionals (such as psychologists) to support such programme developments (The British Psychological Society, 2018).

- At the heart of it, RSE aims to support young people in nurturing their physical, emotional and psychological development. When it comes to a role within schools, EPs undoubtedly have a specialist skill set that should be taken advantage of to help achieve this aim. Their unique contribution comes from offering insights into human behaviour with the use of applied psychology, which is evidence-based and thus has validity in its application. With this in mind, EPs should be sharing examples of good practice with their link schools and help schools to be more person-centred when it comes to teaching RSE.

- EPs should provide ongoing specialist training to schools with a focus on RSE. Normally, a majority of EP work is traded which means casework is often more 1 on 1 with students. However, it would be beneficial for EPs to promote and give whole-school or group interventions which are related to RSE. It could be considered that there is a balance between different types of work. As examples of what EPs could offer, the training they provide could be centred around consultation techniques for parent engagement or could focus on supporting teachers to be confident when it comes to teaching certain topics. Nezhad and Vahedi (2011) express how the links between education and psychology are interdependent, with psychology being a key part of educational reform surrounding the development of teacher pedagogy. EPs are now often considered in the changing scene of the curriculum and thus have a role in supporting teachers on how to guide or support their own students.

- EPs should also consider offering 'quality control checks' related to the RSE curriculum in their link or patch schools. Focus groups in this research found that teachers would welcome external support to help plan or monitor aspects schemes of work related to RSE (e.g. when teaching sensitive topics). One way in which this could be done is by EPs offering drop-in sessions at regular intervals during school visits for stakeholders to offer impartial support or guidance. EPs can use Government policy to guide their checks which can help teachers to implement RSE successfully. For parents, the drop-in session could offer a sense of security related to the benefits of RSE from a psychological perspective.

5.6 Strengths of research

This research had several strengths relating to the methods and findings.

Firstly, it has provided a rich picture of how RSE can be implemented in schools. The literature review found many challenges faced with the attempts in having successful implementation of RSE in schools and this research has provided an example of a case study school where RSE is being done well. A number of other research studies have focused on the challenges or negatives of RSE in schools, however this research has offered an alternative insight into how RSE can be done well.

This was achieved by the research, which was able to answer some questions relating to these challenges and provide examples of good practice. Examples of good practice are ones that have high feasibility within schools. They are practices that should not require substantial efforts to apply in individual schools, therefore making the recommendations outlined in the previous chapter very accessible for stakeholders to consider. The research findings can further be used to help inform schools on how they can achieve more success with RSE engagement. This is a particular benefit given the compulsory element of RSE in schools as part of the curriculum.

Second to this, the participants included in this research contributed to offering a more holistic understanding of implementing RSE in schools. The use of students and teachers as the main stakeholders in education meant that there was a wide variety of views and opinions captured in the findings. Using teachers as part of the sample offered the opportunity for them to share their classroom expertise which was vital to fully understanding how RSE can be implemented in schools to benefit students.

In particular, a final strength of this research has been the use voices of students to better understand RSE. Their voice has been championed throughout this research. Student focus groups demonstrated that they were evidently able to express themselves with some poise by offering insightful accounts of their lived experiences related to RSE. Their insights gave them first-hand knowledge of what they want in RSE and how they view the curriculum, this was essential to getting a better understanding of examples of good practice in RSE. With the hope of their voices being acted upon by other professionals as a result of these findings, there is also hope that students will have a greater sense of ownership over their learning.

5.7 Limitations of research

There were a few limitations to this research. These limitations came as a result of the final findings and discussion outline in the previous chapters.

Firstly, the final sample numbers for participants in the teacher focus groups were lower than originally anticipated. This was due to conflicting teacher demands and them not having enough time to take part in the focus groups. Additionally, the sampling method required that only teachers who had direct involvement in planning or teaching RSE could take part. This limited the overall sampling numbers as not many teachers had sufficient input with regard to the RSE curriculum. While the teachers who did take part were valuable with their insights, it could have been beneficial to have more teachers as part of the final sample. By doing so the validity of the findings could have been stronger and the findings more generalizable.

A second limitation comes from the use of only one case study school in the sample. While the findings in this research can most likely be applied to other schools in different LAs, it could have been valuable to have an additional case study school for comparison. By having two case study schools' additional similarities or differences could have been found which may have highlighted more information surrounding the successful implementation of RSE. The findings could then have had potentially more reach to other schools wanting to implement RSE successfully.

One final limitation of this research is with regards to the use of online focus groups. The teacher focus groups were conducted online. This was done as there were difficulties getting groups of teachers together and it was easier to find a time online to get teachers to participate. Having the focus groups online may have made it difficult for teachers to convey emotions and build rapport through a camera. This is because, the online setting is not typically a 'natural' setting in which the teachers could fully express their emotions and thus some people may have behaved differently as opposed to face-to-face focus groups.

5.8 Future research

Firstly, it would be beneficial to conduct a piece of longitudinal research to see if there are any long-term effects of the implemented examples of good practice. As outlined in the literature, RSE is still relatively in its infancy given that the compulsory element of the curriculum has only recently become part of statutory legislation. Therefore, whilst it appears that the approaches and methods currently being used are working, it would be recommended to see if they are still as useful in the near future. It would be useful to use the same case study school and monitor their RSE curriculum over one academic year with the same groups of students.

Second to this, it could also be beneficial to see how the RSE curriculum works with different ages as they transition into their next phase of learning (i.e. year 6 going into year 7). Transition can be a testing time for a number of students and with the challenges being faced in RSE, it could be useful to assess how RSE can support the transitional phase. For instance, RE has a focus on how to develop friendships and this could be a key teaching when it comes for students going up into the next phase of education.

This current research also focused on students in a primary and secondary school. It may be an area of future research to use students in the post-16 phase of their education. The justification for not using post-16 in this research was based on the fact that they are going into adulthood having had several experiences with RSE and are now more autonomous or independent learners. However, it could be useful to include their voice in future research to find out how well RSE has prepared them for adulthood and beyond their studies, especially once the RSE curriculum has become more embedded in their learning due to the compulsory legislation making it more commonplace in their education.

Finally, the suggested recommendations of good practice should be applied into a number of other schools in other areas with a study conducted to assess if the application of such recommendations can be or has been successful. As the literature review highlighted, there are many schools which are having difficulties with implementing RSE into their own practice. An example of suggested future research could locate such a school, implement the examples of good practice found and discussed in this research and then analysing how successful using such approaches is for RSE. This way, if the findings find an improvement in RSE, with regards to engagement, then the findings presented in this current research will have even more merit.

5.9 Next steps

The research findings will be presented to other trainee EPs and practitioners in the field of educational psychology. This will ensure that the findings and recommendations of best practice will be shared with a wide range of other professionals who in turn can share these examples with their allocated schools and the relevant stakeholders.

Further to this, the research findings will be presented to the case study school as part of a research briefing. The school has requested that the findings be presented as part of their CPD programme to all teachers in the school. This way, the school can use the findings to embed them as part of their schemes of work for RSE and to also add further evidence-base to the current approaches and methods that they use. Additionally, the school has asked for some feedback to the participants who took part in the case study.

Finally, as a trainee EP in a LA, there will be opportunities to share and implement examples of best practice outlined in this research to see if they have application to other schools outside of the case study. There will also be an opportunity to present the findings to other EPs in the LA service, which could then be disseminated to other schools in the local area. The findings from the research can be used in such schools to provide information (such as the research briefing) or could be used as part of the training for schools to have a more in-depth understanding of how to apply the recommendations into practice.

5.10 Conclusions

The main aim of this research was to explore the voices of students and teachers in order to understand what can contribute to the successful enactment of RSE in schools and to find examples of good practice that could be applied to schools to have their own successes. This was explored through the identification of a relevant case study school which is implementing RSE with some success. The successes seen in this school have been outlined to be applied in other schools or contexts where RSE is being taught.

5.10.1 Theoretical frameworks contribution and application

The findings in this research which relate to having success with enacting RSE in a school are supported by the application of the theoretical frameworks outlined in Chapter 1.

Firstly, Bronfenbrenner's ecological systems theory has been found in the case study school as a factor which encourages success. The school fosters and promotes good communication with the varying systems around the student, which helps to strength the mesosystem and thus bridges the gap between student-teacher-parent. There is a sense that the student is at the heart of their system and thus the implications means that the student voice is being heard and used to inform teaching practices.

Additionally, the case study school considers the three needs relating to the SDT from both student and teacher perspectives. As a school, teachers are giving autonomy whilst still feeling supported from their managers and other teaching staff.

Teachers also have a level of confidence when it comes to delivering RSE. This makes them feel more motivated in wanting to plan, deliver and enact RSE. From student perspectives, they feel listened to and have a consensus when it comes to a collective feeling of belonging at the school. Again, this is helping them to develop intrinsic motivational factors to want to be a student at the school and become embedded in their learning.

When considering both frameworks together, the collected data demonstrates that success can be seen when applying them both to a school setting at both an individual and systemic level. Collectively, the frameworks help to provide a way of understanding a range of factors influencing students and staff, which in turn helps to foster an holistic system where each stakeholder is considered and the motivation to engage with learning is paramount.

With regards to contributing to the already existing literature surrounding the usefulness of both Bronfenbrenner and SDT, this research has further supported the use of both theories which can be used as frameworks help to provide insights into how best to support the engagement and motivation of students.

Motivation was a key standout from the findings, as the enactment of RSE was often linked to whether both teachers and students feel motivated to want to engage with the curriculum. By adopting a systemic approach and having strong links between teacher, students and parents, there has been success in enacting RSE. The strongly suggest the value of the two theories in examining ways of supporting learning in school.

5.10.2 Contributing a positive perspective

This research has also contributed to demonstrating the value of adopting a positive perspective on enquiring into the enactment of RSE. As outlined in Chapter one, the majority of research surrounding RSE has focused on the negative aspects of RSE (what is not being done). This research has been able to offer an alternative and positive perspective of RSE in a school with a focus on what contributes to enabling students to understand issues and topics related to the content RSE

The literature review in Chapter one outlined the many difficulties faced with implementing RSE. Academic research aside, the prominence of RSE in the media and the backlash being faced, due to the content being delivered and to which students, is still very apparent. The literature review also highlighted the cost of poor RSE and the challenges which stakeholders face when it comes to developing an RSE curriculum.

While this was important to help create a picture of RSE in schools in England, there needed to be a more holistic understanding of RSE and where it was going well. This current research has highlighted how RSE can be implemented well and has shown that it can constitute as good examples of best practice to be used in other settings. Notably, students were able to offer their voice on how RSE is having a positive impact on them and their personal development in school.

Further to this, a part of the literature review emphasised the cost of poor and some of the related outcomes if RSE does not sufficiently prepare young people. With this in mind, the research here has demonstrated what can be done to support the good implementation of RSE. If policymakers and stakeholders in education are genuinely wanting to support the good development of health and psychological well-being, then examples from this research should be used to influence or support the making of such policies.

5.10.3 Contribution to EP practice

This research has contributed to a better understanding of the importance in working systemic and using specialist agents to offer psychology in the education system.

EPs are encouraged to adopt systemic ways of working in order to have a wider impact on the whole system as opposed to the individual. However, this is not always possible when you factor in time restraints, budget cuts and limited resources. Nonetheless, systemic work is still highly desired and this piece of research has been able to demonstrate the benefits in doing so.

The research has shown that teachers value and wish for collaborative and holistic work. When considering the RSE curriculum, this means that there is a sense of cohesiveness amount teachers, which leads to higher motivation. With this in mind, EPs should therefore continue to advocate for more systemic work within schools. By doing so, it means that there could be more capacity for teachers to focus on other aspects of the school system as the systemic work will have an impact on more than one individual.

The findings also emphasised the importance of applying psychological ideas to enquire into an education system. EPs offer a unique contribution to schools by helping students and teachers better understand human development and how it can be influenced by surrounding factors. The teacher focus groups highlighted the appreciation of using specialists to help them with curriculum development and how to support their students. Therefore, the findings here can help EPs to contribute to school by offering psychological viewpoints and how a range of factors can interact to influence programmes, curricula, and lesson development, as well as inform classroom management approaches and pedagogies, such as how to implement oracy in the classroom by using an evidence-based approach.

5.10.4 Closing statement

When it comes to having success with implementing any recommendations based on research, there has to be an appeal to what is being recommended to the stakeholders. The literature review and research findings have found that good RSE in schools is highly valued and a necessity when it comes to supporting the development of young people. Therefore, the success of implementing the outlined recommendations should have a good level of feasibility for other schools to put into their own practice when it comes to planning their RSE curriculum.

For some, there may be an argument or critique that the findings in this research are not necessarily examples of 'news' in terms of new knowledge about what might

work best for RSE. However, there is something to say about how feasible it can be for schools to implement such approaches and strategies.

Overall, when these are implemented, the findings show that RSE can be successful and that students value the curriculum they are being taught. This is an important conclusion to make given the necessity of RSE for young people in a modern day society, where the need to have a good understanding of relationships and personal development is essential to their well-being.

Chapter 6. References

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7. Appendices

7.1 Appendix 1: Ethics

7.1.1 Completed doctoral ethics form

Doctoral Student Ethics Application Form

Anyone conducting research under the auspices of the Institute of Education (staff, students or visitors) where the research involves human participants or the use of data collected from human participants, is required to gain ethical approval before starting. This includes preliminary and pilot studies. Please answer all relevant questions in simple terms that can be understood by a lay person and note that your form may be returned if incomplete.

Registering your study with the UCL Data Protection Officer as part of the UCL Research Ethics Review Process

If you are proposing to collect personal data i.e. data from which a living individual can be identified, **you must be registered with the UCL Data Protection Office before you submit your ethics application for review**. To do this, email the completed ethics form to the UCL Data Protection Office. Once your registration number is received, add it to the form* and submit it to your supervisor for approval. If the Data Protection Office advises you to make changes to the way in which you propose to collect and store the data this should be reflected in your ethics application form.

Please note that the completion of the UCL GDPR online training is mandatory for all PhD students.

Section 1 – Project details

  a. **Project title:** Exploring the effectiveness of the implementation of the RSE curriculum through school staff, young people and parent perspectives in order to develop and promote examples of good practice.

  b. **Student name and ID number** (e.g. ABC12345678): Perry Draper | DRA11085757

  c. ***UCL Data Protection Registration Number:** Enter text

      a. Date Issued: Enter text

  d. **Supervisor/Personal Tutor:** Dr Ian Warwick / Dr Karen Majors

  e. **Department:** Department of Psychology

  f. **Course category (Tick one):**

     PhD   ☐

     EdD   ☐

     DEdPsy ☒

  g. **If applicable**, state who the funder is and if funding has been confirmed.

h. **Intended research start date:** February 2022
i. **Intended research end date:** June 2023
j. **Country fieldwork will be conducted in**: England
k. If research to be conducted abroad please check the [Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO)](#) and submit a completed travel risk assessment form (see guidelines). If the FCO advice is against travel this will be required before ethical approval can be granted: *[UCL travel advice webpage](#)*
l. Has this project been considered by another (external) Research Ethics Committee?

Yes   ☐

External Committee Name: Enter text
Date of Approval: Enter text

No   ☒   *go to Section 2*

If yes:
- Submit a copy of the approval letter with this application.
- Proceed to Section 10 Attachments.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the [National Research Ethics Service](#) (NRES) or [Social Care Research Ethics Committee](#) (SCREC). In addition, if your research is based in another institution then you may be required to apply to their research ethics committee.

Section 2 - Research methods summary (tick all that apply)

☐ Interviews
☒ Focus Groups
☐ Questionnaires
☐ Action Research
☐ Observation
☒ Literature Review
☐ Controlled trial/other intervention study
☐ Use of personal records
☐ Systematic review **– if only method used go to Section 5**
☐ Secondary data analysis **– *if secondary analysis used go to Section 6***
☐ Advisory/consultation/collaborative groups
☐ Other, give details: Enter text

Please provide an overview of the project, focusing on your methodology. This should include some or all of the following: purpose of the research, aims, main research questions, research design, participants, sampling, data collection (including justifications for methods chosen and description of topics/questions to be asked), reporting and dissemination. Please focus on your methodology; the theory, policy, or literary background of your work can be provided in an attached document (i.e. a full research proposal or case for support document). *Minimum 150 words required.*

Purpose

As outlined by Government, schools are required to implement a Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum for all students which encompasses the statutory guidance. By not doing some there can be accountability measures in the form of OFSTED rating this area of student learning as inadequate. With this responsibility in mind, some teachers are feeling inadequately prepared, some parents want to opt their children out of the curriculum and some students feel they not have agency over the content they would like to be taught about. Yet further than this, at the heart of the implementing the RSE curriculum, there is a need to address the concern of not meeting the needs of CYP in order to ensure that they develop a secure understanding the biological, psychological and sociocultural perspectives of individual beings (Sex Education Forum, 2019). This means that there needs to be an understanding of what primary and secondary schools in England are currently doing well to fulfil these statutory requirements.

As the new RSE curriculum is in its infancy, this could be the best time to understand what values, lessons, perspectives, resources and pedagogies schools are using to demonstrate their legal responsibility. However, as it appears that the majority of schools are finding it difficult to implement a RSE curriculum (ref needed), it would be beneficial to focus on schools which are implementing RSE well. This in turn may provide evidence for what could be seen as examples of good practice and could thus be used to inform the work of other schools in England.

if young people are to have RSE which they value, the issues surrounding implementation need to be resolved. Research has indeed outlined the benefits when RSE is fully implemented including improving their analytical, communication and other life skills for health and well-being in relation to sexuality, human rights, values, healthy and respectful relationships, cultural and social norms, gender equality, non-discrimination, sexual behaviour, violence and gender-based violence, consent, sexual abuse and harmful practices (UNESCO, 2018).

Overall, when schools implement a comprehensive and inclusive RSE curriculum, it enables YP by empowering them to be more informed, make safer choices and have healthier outcomes (Department for Education, 2020). The Sex Education forum (2019) highlight his further by communicating that when CYP have significant understanding of RSE, they are more likely to have better sexual outcomes.

Due to this area being a concern faced by the majority of schools, where there are difficulties in implementing the new RSE curriculum, it would appear more beneficial for schools to have an understanding of what *is* working in schools as opposed to what *isn't*

working. This research will therefore focus on schools which are having some success in engaging students in the RSE curriculum and could therefore be used an example of good practice for other educators.

Aim

This research therefore aims to generate a better understanding of successful and promising approaches to engaging students in RSE. By understanding what schools are doing well to implement the new RSE curriculum, could mean other schools having a better understanding of what they can do to in their own schools, should they be facing the difficulties as discussed.

This research will explore this from teachers, parents and student's perspectives to gain a holistic understanding and will focus on how teachers are engaging students and parents with RSE, why students find the RSE curriculum beneficial and the parental perspectives surrounding the content, delivery and inclusion.

Research Questions

1. What strategies and methods are schools using to implement a good RSE curriculum?
2. How can examples of good practice be applied to other schools?
3. What factors are creating effective ways of implementing good quality RSE?
4. What do CYP want in an RSE curriculum in order to feel it is beneficial to them?

Research design, participants, sampling and methods of data collection

Design
A focused case study method will be adopted as this research is exploring the complex issue of RSE in a real-life setting of 2 schools. Drawing upon research from Hew and Hara (2007), a case study design can be adopted for this research as schools can be classed as institutes.

Sampling
The sample will use a purposive approach and participants will be from 1 primary and 1 secondary School in England. The reason for both a primary and secondary school is due to the fact that RSE is implemented in both and different parts of the RSE curriculum are implemented in different schools. From each of these schools there will be participants in the form of 6 teachers, 6 parents and 6 students. Therefore, there will be a total of 36 participants.

Data Collection
A qualitative research method will be used and 6 focus groups will be adopted to collect data. Focus groups were selected as they enable the opportunity to gain rich perceptions, opinions, ideas and understandings of teachers, parents and students perspectives whereby complex themes will be analysed for discussion. As the topic of RSE is social sensitive, the use of focus groups are suitable as they can help to facilitate guided conversations with those who are similar (E.g. all being students of the same age in one school).

These focus groups will engage with teachers, students and parents in order to identify and explore the relevant solutions associated with delivering and implementing RSE in schools.

Each focus group will run independently of one another and there will be a set of semi-structured questions for each. These questions will be relevant to the findings of the literature review.

From this, recordings will be saved in both Audio and visual formatting. The audio data will then be transcribed to written format and from this transcript, a thematic analysis will be conducted to explore themes within the discussions. This audio data will be stored on a password protected laptop which only I will have access to.

Focus groups will ideally happen face to face, however due to the current climate surrounding COVID-19 they may need to be done online. This will be determined closer to the time. From the focus groups, recordings will be saved in audio formatting. The audio data will then be transcribed to written format transcripts and from these transcripts, a thematic analysis will be conducted to explore themes within the discussions. The use of a thematic analysis has been rationalised as it gives the opportunity to summarise key features of a data set taken from the focus groups and it enables the ability to take a well-structured approach to handling data to answer the research questions.

Reporting and Dissemination
The final report will be made available to the teachers who participate. The report can then be used to perhaps inform new policies or strategies for school with RSE concerns. I will also ensure the full dissertation is available for other interested parties to view through the UCL Library

Section 3 – research Participants (tick all that apply)

☐ Early years/pre-school

☒ Ages 5-11

☒ Ages 12-16

☐ Young people aged 17-18

☒ Adults please specify below*

☐ Unknown – specify below

☐ No participants

All adult participants will be consenting adults who are Fully Qualified Teachers in England, thus the minimum age will be at least 22 years old. Other adults will include parents who have children attending the selected school.

Note: Ensure that you check the guidelines carefully as research with some participants will require ethical approval from a different ethics committee such as the National Research Ethics Service (NRES) or Social Care Research Ethics Committee (SCREC).

Section 4 - Security-sensitive material (only complete if applicable)

Security sensitive research includes: commissioned by the military; commissioned under an EU security call;   involves the acquisition of security clearances; concerns terrorist or extreme groups.

a. Will your project consider or encounter security-sensitive material?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

b. Will you be visiting websites associated with extreme or terrorist organisations?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

c. Will you be storing or transmitting any materials that could be interpreted as promoting or endorsing terrorist acts?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

* *Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 5 – Systematic reviews of research (only complete if applicable)

a. Will you be collecting any new data from participants?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

b. Will you be analysing any secondary data?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

* *Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

*If your methods do not involve engagement with participants (e.g. systematic review, literature review) **and** if you have answered **No** to both questions, please go to **Section 8 Attachments.***

Section 6 - Secondary data analysis (only complete if applicable)

a. Name of dataset/s: Enter text
b. Owner of dataset/s: Enter text
c. Are the data in the public domain?

Yes ☐ No ☐

***If no,** do you have the owner's permission/license?*

Yes ☐ No* ☐

d. Are the data special category personal data (i.e. personal data revealing racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, or trade union membership, and the processing of genetic data, biometric data for the purpose of uniquely identifying a natural person, data concerning health or data concerning a natural person's sex life or sexual orientation)?

Yes* ☐ No ☐

e. Will you be conducting analysis within the remit it was originally collected for?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

f. **If no**, was consent gained from participants for subsequent/future analysis?

Yes ☐ No* ☐

g. **If no,** was data collected prior to ethics approval process?
Yes ☐ No* ☐

*Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues**

If secondary analysis is only method used **and** no answers with asterisks are ticked, go to **Section 9 Attachments.**

Section 7 – Data Storage and Security

Please ensure that you include all hard and electronic data when completing this section.

a. Data subjects - Who will the data be collected from?

Data will be collected from teachers, parents and students

b. What data will be collected? Please provide details of the type of personal data to be collected

Data will be collected in the form of voice recordings. This will be from the focus groups.

Is the data anonymised?   Yes ☒ No* ☐
Do you plan to anonymise the data?   Yes* ☒ No ☐
Do you plan to use individual level data?   Yes* ☒ No ☐
Do you plan to pseudonymise the data?   Yes* ☒ No ☐

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

c. **Disclosure –** Who will the results of your project be disclosed to?

My Research Supervisor and myself will be the only ones who have access to the collected data.

Disclosure – Will personal data be disclosed as part of your project?

No

d. **Data storage** – Please provide details on how and where the data will be stored i.e. UCL network, encrypted USB stick**, encrypted laptop** etc.

Data will be stored on my personal laptop which has an encrypted password. I am the sole user of my laptop and thus access is strictly limited to myself only. All collected data will be online this will be stored to my UCL One Drive account, this is

again password encrypted and only accessible on my own personal laptop which I have access to. Further to this, the data will be kept secure by being consistent with GDPR principles.

** Advanced Encryption Standard 256 bit encryption which has been made a security standard within the NHS

e. **Data Safe Haven (Identifiable Data Handling Solution)** – Will the personal identifiable data collected and processed as part of this research be stored in the UCL Data Safe Haven (mainly used by SLMS divisions, institutes and departments)?
Yes ☐ No ☒

f. How long will the data and records be kept for and in what format?

In line with UCL requirements, the data will be kept and stored for a maximum of 10 years. The data will be stored on my personal computer which is only accessible to me via an encrypted password. The information will be stored in accordance with DPA principles and only used for the purpose of this research

The audio recordings from the focus groups will also be destroyed once the transcription has been completed. This will happen by the deleting of the recorded files by myself and ensuring that no record can be found of the data.

Will personal data be processed or be sent outside the European Economic Area? (If yes, please confirm that there are adequate levels of protections in compliance with GDPR and state what these arrangements are)

No

Will data be archived for use by other researchers? (If yes, please provide details.)

No

g. If personal data is used as part of your project, describe what measures you have in place to ensure that the data is only used for the research purpose e.g. pseudonymization and short retention period of data'.

Pseudonymisation Will be used for all participants, this will be seen in the transcripts. Participates will be referred to by initials rather than their name.

** Give further details in **Section 8 Ethical Issues***

Section 8 – Ethical Issues

Please clearly state the ethical issues which may arise in the course of this research and how will they be addressed.

All issues that may apply should be addressed. Some examples are given below; further information can be found in the guidelines. *Minimum 150 words required.*

- Methods
- Sampling
- Recruitment
- Gatekeepers
- Informed consent
- Potentially vulnerable participants
- Safeguarding/child protection
- Sensitive topics
- International research
- Risks to participants and/or researchers
- Confidentiality/Anonymity
- Disclosures/limits to confidentiality
- Data storage and security both during and after the research (including transfer, sharing, encryption, protection)
- Reporting
- Dissemination and use of findings

Informed Consent

Permission to take part in this research is to be sought from all of the teachers, students and parents who will be participating in the research. Letters will be sent to the all participants (seen in the appendix) which outlines the nature of the study and asks that they give informed consent to participate and to have their voice recorded for the focus groups..

Confidentiality

I will ensure that all the information given by participants is completely confidential. This will be identified clearly in the issued consent form to the all participants. I will still make participants aware of the limits that come with confidentiality and that if I feel any information needs to be passed on for protection or safeguarding issues, this will happen. All Participants will also be made aware that the data and information I collect from them will only be seen by myself. In addition to this, participants may request information relating to the study regarding their information but no one else's.

Anonymity

As I am using participants (Including children) from a primary and secondary school, I will ensure that there is anonymity by changing names of participants if they are mentioned in my piece of research; particularly in the written transcripts. In addition to this, all participants will be given a case number or alternative Initials rather than a name. This will ensure that no one can identify the participants should they read the final report.

Data Storage

All pieces of data collected will be stored on my own personal laptop which has a secure encrypted password. This laptop is solely used by myself and therefore the data will only be accessed by myself.

Post research

The findings will be submitted as part of my Doctorate in Educational and Child Psychology to UCL IOE. The findings will be analysed and reported with the confidentiality of participants. The participants will be given the opportunity to be sent a summary of the findings.

Please confirm that the processing of the data is not likely to cause substantial damage or distress to an individual

Yes ☒ No ☐

Section 9 – Attachments.

Please attach your information sheets and consent forms to your ethics application before requesting a Data Protection number from the UCL Data Protection office. Note that they will be unable to issue you the Data Protection number until all such documentation is received

a. Information sheets, consent forms and other materials to be used to inform potential participants about the research (List attachments below)
   Yes ☒ No ☐

   Information and consent forms for Teachers, parents and students

b. Approval letter from external Research Ethics Committee   Yes ☐
c. The proposal ('case for support') for the project   Yes ☒
d. Full risk assessment   Yes ☐

Section 10 – Declaration

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge the information in this form is correct and that this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of this project.

I have discussed the ethical issues relating to my research with my supervisor.
Yes ☒ No ☐

I have attended the appropriate ethics training provided by my course.
Yes ☒ No ☐

I confirm that to the best of my knowledge:

The above information is correct and that this is a full description of the ethics issues that may arise in the course of this project.

Name   Mr Perry Draper

Date   20/01/2022

Please submit your completed ethics forms to your supervisor for review.

Notes and references

Professional code of ethics
You should read and understand relevant ethics guidelines, for example:
British Psychological Society (2018) *Code of Ethics and Conduct*
Or
British Educational Research Association (2018) *Ethical Guidelines*
Or
British Sociological Association (2017) *Statement of Ethical Practice*
Please see the respective websites for these or later versions; direct links to the latest versions are available on the Institute of Education Research Ethics website.

Disclosure and Barring Service checks

If you are planning to carry out research in regulated Education environments such as Schools, or if your research will bring you into contact with children and young people (under the age of 18), you will need to have a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) CHECK, before you start. The DBS was previously known as the Criminal Records Bureau (CRB). If you do not already hold a current DBS check, and have not registered with the DBS update service, you will need to obtain one through at IOE.

Ensure that you apply for the DBS check in plenty of time as will take around 4 weeks, though can take longer depending on the circumstances.

Further references

Robson, Colin (2011). *Real world research: a resource for social scientists and practitioner researchers* (3rd edition). Oxford: Blackwell.
This text has a helpful section on ethical considerations.

Alderson, P. and Morrow, V. (2011) *The Ethics of Research with Children and Young People: A Practical Handbook.* London: Sage.
This text has useful suggestions if you are conducting research with children and young people.

Wiles, R. (2013) What are Qualitative Research Ethics? Bloomsbury.
A useful and short text covering areas including informed consent, approaches to research ethics including examples of ethical dilemmas.

Departmental Use

If a project raises particularly challenging ethics issues, or a more detailed review would be appropriate, the supervisor must refer the application to the Research Development Administrator via email so that it can be submitted to the IOE Research Ethics Committee for consideration. A departmental research ethics coordinator or representative can advise you, either to support your review process, or help decide whether an application should be referred to the REC. If unsure please refer to the guidelines explaining when to refer the ethics application to the IOE Research Ethics Committee, posted on the committee's website.

Student name: Perry Draper

Student department:

Course:

Project Title:

Reviewer 1

Supervisor/first reviewer name:

Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?

Supervisor/first reviewer signature:

Date:

Reviewer 2

Second reviewer name:

Do you foresee any ethical difficulties with this research?

Second reviewer signature:

Date:

Decision on behalf of reviewers

Approved ☒

Approved subject to the following additional measures ☐

Not approved for the reasons given below ☐

Referred to the REC for review ☐

Points to be noted by other reviewers and in report to REC:

Comments from reviewers for the applicant:

Once it is approved by both reviewers, students should submit their ethics application form to the Centre for Doctoral Education team: IOE.CDE@ucl.ac.uk.

7.1.2 Ethical approval confirmation

With these actions in mind, I am pleased to confirm that this project is now registered under, reference No **Z6364106/2022/10/60 social research** in line with UCL's Data Protection Policy.

You may quote this reference on your Ethics Application Form, or any other related forms.

You should make arrangements as early as possible for the secure long-term storage of your data, taking into account any specific requirements of your department or funder. UCL staff and PhD students can use the UCL Research Data Repository while undergraduate and Masters students may want to ask their supervisors about the Open Education Repository. The Research Data Management team can be contacted at lib-researchsupport@ucl.ac.uk.

UCL staff can contact the Records Office records.office@ucl.ac.uk to arrange for the long-term secure storage of their research records.

7.2 Appendix 2: Questions used to help select the case study School

This Questionnaire used informally by researcher in London and surrounding areas. Each question will be rated from 1-5, with 1 being 'not at all' and 5 being 'yes very' or will require a 'yes' or 'no' response. This means that all the data can be quantified.

1. Your school has a diverse demographic population (e.g. diverse in gender, ethnicity, religion background, etc.)?
2. Have OFSTED indicated there is sufficient application of an RSE curriculum?
3. The school has a secure knowledge of the current policies surrounding RSE?
4. Has your school developed a scheme of work to implement RSE?
5. Does your scheme of work meet the statutory requirements for RSE as outlined by the Department for Education?
6. Do you have direct involvement in the planning of the RSE curriculum in your school?
7. If your answer to question 6 is yes, please explain how below
8. Do you have direct involvement in the delivering of the RSE curriculum in your school?
9. If your answer to question 8 is yes, please explain how below
10. Do you have a high level of participation with students engaging in RSE? (I.e. they have not chosen to opt from any RSE, if they are legally allowed to do so?)
11. Do you have a high level of participation with parents engaging in RSE? (I.e. they have not chosen)

7.3 Appendix 3: Information sheet and consent form for teachers

Dear **Participant:**

I am currently a Doctoral Student at UCL IOE and I am writing to ask for your permission to participate in a University research project to **explore the effectiveness of the implementation of the Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum in order to develop and promote examples of good practice.**

However, the decision about participation is yours. To help you in this decision, I have briefly summarised what will happen.

Who is carrying out the research?

Mr Perry Draper – UCL IOE second year Trainee Educational Psychologist

Why are we doing this research?

To understand what schools are doing to enact the new compulsory RSE. RSE is an important topic which covers a wide range of topics, including friendships, romantic relationships and sexual health. As some schools are finding to challenging to enact the new RSE, this research wants to understand what schools are doing to enact the new compulsory RSE. To do this, I would like to understand the perspectives form teachers, parents and students. These 3 groups can offer valuable insights into this area which can hopefully be used by other educators to also enact RSE successfully.

Why am I being invited to take part?

As a qualified teacher working directly with young people, you will be contributing a unique perspective by sharing your own experiences. The sharing of these experiences could help to understand what may work to implement successful RSE now and in the future, particularly in an educational context.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

Participation will require 1-2 hours of your time to attend a focus group which will be voice recorded for analysis purposes. The exact dates and time will be finalized once I have

recruited all participants, but as an estimate, it will be conducted around the week commencing May 2022 and the time will be decided closer to the time to suit all participating.

During this one off focus group, you will meet with 3/4 other teachers, and I (the researcher) will facilitate a group discussion based around what you as teachers believe are important factors which have led to the RSE curriculum being implemented successfully in your school.

Will anyone know I have been involved?

High levels of confidentiality are assured in many ways. The focus group will only be open to the attendees who wish to take part and the voice recordings will only be listened by myself and discarded once my research has been completed. If I need to refer to any comments made by specific teachers in my final report, they will be anonymized to protect confidentially. If I have to disclose information, for example if I have concerns about the welfare of the participant, then I have an obligation to do so.

Could there be problems for me if I take part?

As we are discussing lived experiences and sex education, they may be some topics which could be uncomfortable or sensitive. If this happens, and you feel uncomfortable, you are entitled to stop at any point.

What will happen to the results of the research?

I will take the voice recordings of the conversations and analyse what has been said to understand any emerging themes or standout points which can shed light on the research topic. As part of my analysis I will only need to analyses the voice recordings and thus identification of any participant will not be possible in the final report.

I will then write this up into a summary of findings and will be made available to the participants who participate. The report can then be used to perhaps inform new policies or strategies for what is seen as good practice relating to the RSE curriculum. I will also ensure the full report is available for other interested parties to view through the UCL Library.

Do I have to take part?

It is entirely up to you whether or not you choose to take part. We hope that if you do choose to be involved then you will find it a valuable experience. However, if you choose not to take part there will be no negative repercussions for this.

Data Protection Privacy Notice

The controller for this project will be University College London (UCL). The UCL Data

Protection Officer provides oversight of UCL activities involving the processing of

personal data, and can be contacted at data-protection@ucl.ac.uk

This 'local' privacy notice sets out the information that applies to this particular study.

Further information on how UCL uses participant information from research studies can

be found in our 'general' privacy notice for participants in research studies here.

The information that is required to be provided to participants under data protection

legislation (GDPR and DPA 2018) is provided across both the 'local' and 'general'

privacy notices. The lawful basis that will be used to process any personal data is:

'Public task' for personal data and 'Research purposes' for special category data. We

will be collecting personal data such as: name and teaching role.

Your personal data will be processed so long as it is required for the research project.

I will anonymize or pseudonymise the personal data and will endeavour to minimize the processing of personal data wherever

possible.

Contact for further information

If you have any questions about the study, or if you would like additional information to assist you in reaching a decision, please feel free to contact me **Perry Draper** at p.draper.14@ucl.ac.uk or Tel. 07833166551.

If you would like to be involved, please complete the consent form and return

to me via email asap.

Thank you in advance for your interest and support of this project.

Sincerely,

Mr. Perry Draper

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Consent Form

I have read the information letter concerning the research project **to explore the effectiveness of the implementation of the Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum in order to develop and promote examples of good practice** conducted by **Perry Draper** of the Department of **Psychology** at University College of London.

I Certify that:

□ I have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive any additional details I wanted about the study.

□ I Understand the purpose for which my consent is being sought to voice record the focus group session and take part in a focus group with other teachers.

□ I Have read the information sheet (above) explaining my rights in relation to the voice recordings.

□ I Understand that the voice recordings will be erased at the end of the end of the research project and the DEdPsy programme.

□ I am aware that I may withdraw consent at any time.

□ I would like to take part in this study

If I have any questions about the study I can feel free to contact the researcher **(Perry Draper, Email:** p.draper.14@ucl.ac.uk**).**

Name **(please print)** _____

Birth Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date
_____

Researcher's Title _____ Department
_____

7.4 Appendix 4: Information and consent forms for students

Dear **Participant:**

I am currently a Doctoral Student at UCL IOE, and I am writing to ask for your permission to participate in a university research project to **explore the effectiveness of the implementation of the Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum in order to develop and promote examples of good practice.**

However, the decision about participation is yours. To help you in this decision, I have briefly summarized what will happen.

Who is carrying out the research?

Mr Perry Draper – UCL IOE second year Trainee Educational Psychologist

Why are we doing this research?

I want to find out how you are finding the new RSE which is being delivered in schools. You will help me to find out lots of information by giving your views and opinions.

Why am I being invited to take part?

As a student who is actively taking part in the RSE curriculum, you will be contributing a unique perspective by sharing your own experiences.

What will happen if I choose to take part?

You will attend a focus group which will be voice recorded. The exact dates and time will be finalized once I have recruited all participants, but as an estimate, it will be conducted around September 2022 and will be carried out around at time suitable for everyone.

During this one off focus group, you will meet with 3/4 other students, and I (the researcher) will run a group discussion based around what you as students believe are important factors which have led to the RSE curriculum being implemented successfully in your school.

Will anyone know I have been involved?

High levels of confidentiality are assured in many ways. The focus group will only be open to those who attend and the voice recordings will only be listened by myself and deleted once my research is done. If I need to refer to any comments made by specific students in my final report, they will be anonymized to protect confidentially. If I may have to disclose information, for example if I have concerns about the welfare of the participant, then I have an obligation to do so.

Could there be problems for me if I take part?

As we are discussing lived experiences and sex education, they may be some topics which could be uncomfortable or sensitive. If this happens, and you feel uncomfortable, you are entitled to stop at any point.

What will happen to the results of the research?

I will take the voice recordings of the conversations and analyse what has been said to understand any themes or standout points.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you whether you would like to take part or not. If you start the study and then change your mind, you can stop at any time. You will not be in any trouble and you do not have to tell us why you want to stop doing the study.

I want to talk more to the researcher

If you have any questions about the study, or if you would like a additional information to assist you in reaching a decision, please feel free to contact me **Perry Draper** at p.draper.14@ucl.ac.uk

or

Tel. 07833166551.

If you would like to be involved, please complete the consent form and return

to me via email asap.

Thank you in advance for your interest and support of this project.

Sincerely,

Mr. Perry Draper

Trainee Educational Psychologist

Consent Form

I have read the information letter concerning the research project **to explore the effectiveness of the implementation of the Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) curriculum in order to develop and promote examples of good practice** conducted by **Perry Draper** of the Department of **Psychology** at University College of London.

I Certify that:

☐ I have had the opportunity to ask questions and receive any additional details I wanted about the study.

☐ I Understand the purpose for which my consent is being sought to voice record the focus group session and take part in a focus group with other students.

☐ I Have read the information sheet (above) explaining my rights in relation to the voice recordings.

☐ I Understand that the voice recordings will be erased at the end of the end of the research project and the DEdPsy programme.

☐ I am aware that I may withdraw consent at any time.

☐ I would like to take part in this study

If I have any questions about the study I can feel free to contact the researcher **(Perry Draper, Email:** p.draper.14@ucl.ac.uk**).**

Name **(please print)** _____

Birth Date _____

Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Signature _____ Date _____

Researcher's Title _____ Department _____

7.5 Appendix 5: Transcript from teacher focus groups

7.5.1 Primary school teacher focus group

1 **Researcher**

2 So the first question, thinking of your school, how is relationship and sex education taught?

3 **Teacher 1**

4 So coming from a primary school perspective, within School X, it's massively taught through
5 the through the coaching curriculum. So for context, that's like form time, but it happens
6 three lessons a week, rather than at the end of the day. Sometimes there'll be specific half
7 terms or terms that are entirely focused around relationships and sex education for that year
8 group. Or it'll be drip fed through other schemes of work or particular sessions. But there is
9 really specific time given to it in those sessions.

10 **Teacher 2**

11 Yeah, so just building on that. You'll also have specific assemblies, which might be used to
12 address specific issues, timetabled in. There are also elements of RSE, which are covered
13 within other lesson areas. So for example, I know that in year six, they study aspects of
14 reproduction system of within science, and puberty in year five, they do within science. Also,
15 just other subjects, like I know, in drama, for example, in year seven, they cover aspects of
16 sexting within the drama scheme of work. So there's various other cross curricular ways that
17 it's dealt with as well. But the core heart of it is within the coaching curriculum.

18 **Teacher 3**

19 So, in primary, I would say the main strategies that we use are mostly wellbeing assemblies,
20 and they mostly underpin

21 techniques. so that in the children's interest to explore different themes, kind of different
22 moral themes within relationships as well above big bulk that will be taught through kind of
23 family dynamic and relationships within families through our diversity. So every week, there
24 is an opportunity to explore different areas of diversities that will be through different family
25 models and friendship within that as well. Often we will have some targeted months, like
26 diversity month for example like LGBT history month. And it's mostly interwoven with
27 grounding texts in English. Yeah, mainly, I would say, a lot of the conversation.

28 **Researcher**

29 Okay, question two, then. So as those of your teachers who deliver RSE, in terms of helping
30 you to do that, what support have you been given if any, to deliver RSE in your school?

31 **Teacher 2**

32 So in the in the role of lead of Primary coaching RSE takes a huge priority. I worked
33 especially when it changed when the Department of Education and legislation around RSE
34 changed slightly, and it was very inclusive of LGBTQ+ relationships education, rather than
35 being very exclusive. Then there was written more about gender, and how to be more
36 thoughtful around topics around gender and pronouns. And so I would run staff training
37 around like how to be really thoughtful in the language that we use and not just falling into
38 traps of like traditional RSE and all of the horror stories or stories that you hear. Also, when I
39 was working with my team, we created an RSE checklist. So it was still giving autonomy to
40 teachers to plan their own things, because I wanted the coach to be able to have autonomy
41 in that space to plan around the content. So we would always make sure that it would draw
42 back to the law that we were trying to take trying to teach draw back to the consent around it.
43 And draw back to lived experience in terms of culture, and the world that we're living in

44 currently. So it was making sure that when you're planning a session, that you're really
45 thinking about all of those three lenses and making sure that the session can exist through
46 all three of those lenses. Because otherwise if it misses one of them out, it's not going to be
47 as fruitful or thoughtful as you'd want it to be, and I think that massively helped in terms of
48 training and teachers feeling a bit more confident because they were planning it and they
49 weren't just being given slide like 'let's talk about some vulvas and some penises' it was like,
50 here is the content that I need you to deliver, let's talk about how we can do that. Because I
51 think a lot of staff can feel quite stressed or quite nervous, like they don't have the
52 information themselves, especially when we're talking about like, queer RSE and things like
53 that. So it was really important for us to have that checklist so that there was autonomy for
54 the staff, but also an open dialogue around that all the time, rather than just being like, here
55 are the slides go and teach this now.

Teacher 4

57 So within the School, its changed and evolved. But we would have fortnightly meetings,
58 which were focused around coaching and training and support as well as the kind of more
59 admin side of things. But predominantly focused on the support and training aspects. What
60 we found with those was that the most effective way to do it was to deliver that training in the
61 style of a coaching session, so that we're modelling the pedagogy. So the content and the
62 training we'd be exploring would be adapted to suit adults and what we wanted to talk about,
63 but we'd be using the same pedagogies that we'd be using within the lessons, particularly, to
64 model how to encourage a more discursive approach to RSE. I feel like a lot of a more
65 traditional model of RSE is very kind of teacher led and a lot of teacher exposition. But we
66 wanted approach, which is more discursive. so we'd modelled that within the training. We've
67 also had a lot of conversations and offers of support which we try as much as possible. But
68 unfortunately, timing means it's not always as possible as you'd hoped. But doing things like
69 team teaching, observations, feedback, those kinds of things. So yeah, sometimes I'd go in
70 and team teach with another teacher so that we could then develop each other's practice in
71 that way as well.

Teacher 5

73 I would say a lot of the support was from literature, so using that as a basis to explore
74 different themes. So I wouldn't say there was much formal support from SLT. A lot of the
75 conversations had within classes was kind of dependent on classroom teacher's
76 competence and their willingness to confront certain topics, whether or not it was relevant to
77 the class, whether or not there was an issue in the class that was kind of a pattern that
78 needed to be addressed. Other than that, there was often a kind of skeleton sort of content
79 that was delivered throughout the year in assemblies and there's a theme that was given to
80 each assembly and then teachers were responsible for planning each assembly, but it was
81 left open to individual teachers, individual year groups, how they tackled that. Yeah, I
82 wouldn't say there was much more support influences from the leadership in that.

Researcher

84 Just build on that you say that SLT didn't directly get involved. Is that something that you
85 think would have benefited you delivering RSE? Or was it something that as teachers you
86 felt you were able to do on your own?

Teacher 5

88 I think from my experience; it was something that I was willing and quite eager to do. I think,
89 often what I've seen from wellbeing/RSE content in lessons and delivered in kind of
90 assemblies and things. It can be very surface level, and I'm not always sure that has the
91 most impact or is explored kind of thoroughly. And it's really is left up to individual teachers,
92 there's not a lot of guidance on it. That's followed up on throughout the years. I think in early
93 years, there's a lot more guidance, because they follow a really thorough framework. Then in

94   year four and year 6 six there is sort of an imperative compulsory education that's delivered
95   and they give consent to that.

Teacher 1

97   Just to jump on that as well. Obviously, I think it's important that the RSE is teacher lead or
98   curriculum lead. However, because the D of E guidance is that if a student's parent takes
99   them out of sex education, then best practice is that the head teacher would then talk to
100 them, or a member of SLT would then talk to them and question why have they taken their
101 student out, and where are they going to be getting the education from elsewhere. So I do
102 think it's important for SLT to have a really strong understanding of what is being done. So
103 that when they have, those conversations with families, they're as informed as they would be
104 talking to the teacher who's running it. And I don't know if that always happens because I
105 know I got into a few sticky situations when parents had to have conversations with SLT that
106 didn't really know what the content was or wasn't hugely up to date on the new legislation,
107 and it kind of landed us in a bit of hot water. So I even though I don't think it should be SLT
108 created, because they're not the people who have to know the students as well, but I do
109 think SLT should really really have a grip on that curriculum because of the conversation that
110 they will ultimately need to have about it.

Teacher 3

112 Yeah, building on that I have had a few similar situations where, because I was a lead in
113 some areas, I was delivering workshops and then left with very difficult questions around
114 how we were teaching about relationships and family. Whereas there was no SLT present
115 and that often left us in a very vulnerable place.

Researcher

117 We've kind of touched on a bit briefly. But the next question, I think, is more from a young
118 person's perspective. So in terms of how you've delivered RSE lessons and content, what
119 strategies and methods are you using to do that?

Teacher 2

121 I think student voice is always super important when it comes to things like this because as
122 well as u making sure that you as a practitioner are up to date. There's also a certain level of
123 students not going to listen, if they think the information that they're getting is out of date, or
124 in some way not massively in touch with them. And so, because obviously, the core of RSE
125 is always pretty much going to be the same. I mean, it's always going to have like consent
126 running through it at the core of absolutely everything and then that the feeling of like being
127 comfortable. But I think, what was really good at this school is because the year groups were
128 quite small, it meant that the student voice was quite loud. Because there are only 80
129 students in a year group. And I think that is diluted when you get to year groups where
130 there's like 180 kids in a year. Whereas when there's 80 it's definitely easier to listen to the
131 majority of the student voice, and get it right, and get it comfortable for most for most
132 students, I believe. So I think listening to them and listening to what they were hearing about
133 their world, it was then our job to then turn that into what we needed them to understand. So,
134 them talking to us about the world that they were living in, but us then matching it to needing
135 to teach them about a particular area. So how can we like jumble both of those to make it
136 something that is going to make sense to them. And that's also having a really good
137 knowledge of your local area too because that when you're talking about like sexual health
138 clinics, or when you're talking about family planning, and all of that kind of stuff that you do
139 have to talk about, I do think it's really important that you have a really strong local
140 knowledge so that you can support your students in a realistic way rather than just a surface
141 level way.

Teacher 3

143 Yeah, for me, I think this is where the grounding texts and stimuluses come in useful. So,
144 developing a multimedia approach to RSE. So, it's not just going through reading or going
145 through PowerPoint presentations, and trying to link that to things that might interest the
146 students. So, for example, looking at conflict using clips from reality TV showing arguments
147 from reality TV and looking at that as a conflict. In primary school, using things like
148 Paddington as a stimulus to explore issues of immigration. Then using film, like clips from
149 'inside out' to explore how we talk about emotions and things like that. So, there's, there's
150 just loads of ways that we can try and bring in other stimuli and other grounding texts.

Teacher 1

152 Yeah, we used to use 'chewing gum dreams', the play version by Michaela Cole, with the
153 intent to explore healthy and unhealthy relationships. So yeah, I do think grounding texts are
154 very important.

Teacher 4

156 Yeah, and I definitely learned, especially with the year five and year six classes we started
157 moving away from reading, or getting stuck in a story, because the teachers felt like the
158 students have that so much, their whole morning is just reading, they do so much reading so
159 much book analysis and text analysis, bringing out another text or book for them to kind of
160 get their head around detracted from the RSE element and it just took away from their
161 enjoyment of it and felt just like another English lesson to them, no matter how much we try
162 and removed and made it more discursive. So, bringing in like multimedia, I think was quite a
163 nice or nice way to support with that.

Teacher 6

165 I would say on that question an important thing would be responsiveness from teachers as
166 well. So, I always just say that it's the same with any subject. So, if you're teaching maths,
167 and you're teaching something that the kids clearly understand, then then move on. But
168 equally if you're teaching something that the students are more interested and want to learn
169 more about, or are struggling to get their heads around, and you go over it some more. So,
170 when you're teaching RSE, it's the same, you sometimes feel like you have to tick the boxes,
171 but there's no point moving on if the students haven't understood a concept or if they're
172 asking lots of questions about it. And so, allowing yourself to linger on those topics which the
173 students are clearly more interested in and want to know more about, I think is something
174 that we would encourage.

Researcher

176 The next question, I wanted to ask you about how you might approach and deliver sensitive
177 topics in RSE. how have you approached it in the school, and how have you gone about
178 delivering that to the children, young people you work with?

Teacher 2

180 The year is punctuated with certain kind of times in the year, and we'll learn about specific
181 content. So, February is LGBT+ History Month. So, we learned about different LGBT
182 champions, each year group is assigned three different LGBT champions where there was
183 coverage of different gender identities and communities and different kinds of areas of LGBT
184 life that have been affected or being impacted. And also, different fields that they were that
185 they kind of worked in, or they were specialized in, so that they're getting really good
186 representation of different jobs and different ways that they've impacted the world. So,
187 parents are aware, most of the time. Every year, we do get parents coming in that seem
188 shocked we are teaching them about sex. And the kids will learn about these champions and
189 deliver their own assemblies, based on one of the champions that we've learned. There is a
190 lot of student autonomy. We also have a really strong network of diversity ambassadors so

191 that's students who have a lot to do with kind of running, delivering workshops, and they kind
192 of become experts in the field or in the Director of Diversity and they're really empowered to
193 be independent, and take that on, and inspire other children as well. Every year we look for
194 ambassadors. And that's something that is then taken on into the next phases. So, in year
195 five, and six, and then year seven, it kind of goes on. So that's quite a strong program that's
196 running. We also have diversity month, which covers LGBT content as well. Again,
197 grounding texts are really, really important there. So, learning through stories through
198 storytelling through different characters.

Teacher 3

200 Building on from that and talking about the families, I think it can be really difficult, because
201 obviously, there's by nature, a huge generational divide, so often, as teachers, I think you
202 can get bogged down in trying to make the parents understand. And this might be quite a
203 controversial opinion. But I think it's actually really important to remember that we're not
204 trying to teach the parents, we're trying to teach their children and then hopefully their
205 children will believe in that enough to be able to go home and support the work with their
206 parents. And obviously, we will tell their parents like what we are working on and how we
207 and how we work on that and how we approach that. But I do think it's really important to
208 remember that we aren't there trying to teach the parents because that could seem like a
209 really difficult battle. But that whatever we can do to support their children and support the
210 children in our care, is ultimately what we are there to do. So, I think as long as you're
211 making sure that the families are super informed of what it is that you're that you're teaching
212 in terms of the facts, and topic titles. I think how you teach it and how in depth you go into it
213 is more important to worry about your class rather than worry about what the parents are
214 going to say when their kid goes home and says, 'Oh, we did this in class today'. Because
215 otherwise you would never get anywhere. Because it's the only subject in school that I think
216 you really think about 'oh god, what are the parents going to say when they go home', I don't
217 think you think about that event in like any other subject and I don't think we should have to
218 think about it in RSE. But then that goes back to like making sure that you feel really
219 protected and safe in your school to do all the things that you're supposed to be doing, when
220 that backlash inevitably can happen.

Teacher 5

222 it's actually about establishing the right culture within the sessions. So, you want to create a
223 safe space where students feel able to discuss openly. So, for me, there'd always be some
224 really clear ground rules. So, for example, things that are okay to do are to ask questions or
225 disagree respectfully with someone. But then there are also things where it's really not okay,
226 so like homophobic language, as an example, that's not okay and not only is that not okay,
227 within this lesson, it's not okay within this school, and can result in exclusion. So really
228 setting up those ground rules, I think is really important when you're having those
229 conversations, and actually you don't always didn't always get it right with every class. But
230 when you do get it right, it is really magical. I remember having one class that they were
231 talking about adoption. And, you know, one student made a point of saying that they would
232 be concerned that same sex parents would kind of want to raise their, their child as
233 homosexual themselves. And but then another child challenged that and said, 'well, actually,
234 I don't see how that would be the case, because they would understand having a different
235 sexuality to their own parents' and actually having the space where the children are able to
236 challenge each other, respectfully, I think really helped that. But then equally, they knew that
237 if they crossed the line and said anything that was offensive, or disrespectful, then that they
238 would have been out of that room, and they would have been a follow up sanction.

Teacher 6

240 Yeah, in terms of what you're saying about just sensitive topics, things like toxic friendships.
241 we would often deal with that by looking at it externally first, so for example, we had an

242   agony aunt schemes of work, where you you'd look at case studies of other people, what
243   advice would you give to them, and then it externalizes it first, and the students find it easier
244   and safer to talk about it, when you're giving advice to other people. Then when you have to
245   bring it back in on them it's easier to do. But if you start going in on straight to their own
246   personal experiences, then that can feel quite exposing and they kind of immediately can get
247   quite defensive. So yeah, I think that that that would be kind of one big way that we would
248   approach those kinds of topics.

249 **Researcher**

250   Okay, the next question, we've kind of touched upon but looking at parent involvement. So,
251   how have you worked with parents to encourage them their children to opt into RSE? What
252   have you done to try and encourage them to say, yes, we want your child to be part of the
253   RSE curriculum.

254 **Teacher 1**

255   In my experience, it's not usually been getting the children to opt in, it has been getting the
256   parents to get their child to opt in. An experience that I have had is that when the letter went
257   home saying we're going to be doing sex education, and we're going to be looking at
258   contraception and things like that. Because the letter doesn't have the lesson plans in it or
259   anything like that, it just headlines it. So, parents were really overwhelmed and were like, 'oh
260   my god, I can't let my child know about those things'. But then when I actually had a meeting
261   with that parent and talked to them and talked them through their sessions and showed them
262   resources that we were going to be using and the language that we were going to be using,
263   it really calmed that parent, and then that parent changed their mind and wanted their child
264   to be part of RSE. It's like this quite big, scary thing because it is so unknown to them. And
265   especially with a lot of parents, they will have their own experiences of sex ed which are
266   probably fucking awful and something that they wouldn't ever want their child to go through.
267   Or because parents will have difficult relationships with sex and relationships themselves
268   and so see it through one specific lens.

269 **Teacher 4**

270   I spoke to one parent who thought that we were literally going to be teaching their child how
271   to have sex and obviously there is part of it, but it was as though they thought we were
272   advocating them having underage sex and giving them a Toolkit, which obviously isn't what
273   we're doing. We're preparing them to be ready for it and preparing them to know what feels
274   okay and what shouldn't in terms of emotional boundaries. But yeah, I think a lot of the time
275   with parents, it's more that they don't know what, what it is that you're doing. So, there's
276   parents that do worry about it. I think giving them a bit more information. Specifically, about
277   the sessions is important, but then I wouldn't do that in a big group space because I think
278   parents can have quite a negative group think. I would much more tackle that on a one-one
279   basis.

280 **Teacher 2**

281   Yeah, we sort of approached relationship education and sex education differently when in
282   terms of communicating to parents. So, a relationship education, we tried to get in the habit
283   of every term sending a letter and saying, 'this is what we're covering in coaching this term'.
284   There were a few reasons for that. One is we wanted to encourage the parents to have
285   conversations at home about it. Another key aim was to normalize it. So, whatever we were
286   doing in coaching, parents were aware. What I didn't like is every time we felt like we were
287   covering something that might feel controversial, to send out the letter only then, because
288   then it almost highlights it as something that is potentially controversial. Rather than
289   normalizing it. So, for example, if we were covering different types of family structures,
290   including same sex couples, rather than sending a letter home to parents be like 'Alert, alert,
291   we're covering same sex.' It's was changed to be like, 'Oh, and this term we're talking about

292 this and this term, we're talking about that'. So, parents are aware, but it's not done in a way
293 that feels like it's unusual or scary or it's controversial. I mean, bottom line, if they wanted to
294 withdraw them from relationship education, they no longer can but good practice is to make
295 sure that parents are aware of what we're talking about.

Teacher 3

297 Yeah, also we did invite parents in so they would have meetings where they would talk
298 through with parents what they would do, but I think, particularly with primary school, that's
299 quite normal practice. I think primary school parents are a slightly different breed and they
300 want that contact which is important to primary parents in a way that secondary parents start
301 to kind of they start to step back a bit more. But the turnout generally was quite low. But that
302 was their strategy was.

Teacher 5

304 To build upon on what the others have said. I think it's important to cultivate an environment
305 where you're able to inform parents without opening up an opportunity for debate about
306 whether something is appropriate. I've delivered workshops in person and that's almost seen
307 to be unacceptable and then that is what creates a kind of pandemonium. I also think that
308 the fact that we have a lot of relationships, family structures and all that spoken about on a
309 regular basis, those conversations are already normalized now. So, it's not a big scary topic
310 to kids and they have a lot of a lot of language around this topic. So, it's not introduced and
311 then it's this huge process, but they're really used to it and they have a lot of terminology
312 which then to build upon when they get to year 5 and year 6.

Researcher

314 Thank you. The next question then is thinking about some of the positives for RSE. What do
315 you think has gone well with enacting it in the schools?

Teacher 4

317 With my coaching group before we did a session, we really spoken about how we wanted
318 that space to feel and how we wanted that space to be. And so, speaking on things like
319 freedom to ask questions, freedom to respectfully disagree with someone, freedom to ask
320 something that could be potentially embarrassing, but there's a kindness in the room that
321 lead you to not feeling embarrassed but like everyone's there together. And I did like a whole
322 session with my coaching group about what that looks like and what it doesn't look like and
323 how we make that happen. So then when we went into the session, we then started talking
324 about RSE and we were sitting in a circle, and it was really calm and everyone was just
325 asking questions. And I remember at one point, there were topics that were hard and there
326 were a few kids that were a bit like, 'Oh God, this is overwhelming', but they felt okay to say,
327 'Oh, this is weird', or like, 'Oh, this feels a lot, and other students were supporting them. So,
328 for me, that was one of the most successful RSE things that I've ever done, because the
329 room just felt safe. And I think all the prep work is what makes sessions go successfully. I
330 don't think it works. When you're just like, 'oh, this session, we're just going to like dip into
331 sex ed', and then you've done your session and it works in terms of always tick that box with
332 the school like 'yeah, we've taught our kids about contraception, well done', but they've not
333 really taken it in or understood it because the space wasn't harboured for them to be able to
334 feel comfortable to ask questions or to indulge in the information because you have to run
335 through it so quickly. So, I think in terms of things that have gone well for me, I've always
336 had like a lot of pre-emptive work with the students.

Teacher 2

338 Yeah, I just wanted to build on that in saying that, for me, part of that pre-emptive work is not
339 just about the contents of preparing for a specific session. It's about developing the right

340　culture, within the class and within the space. So right from the start, before you even begin
341　talking about sex education with our students, developing that safe space, developing that
342　kind of a more discursive pedagogy and making that space feel safe and making students
343　feel able to ask questions and feel respected.

Teacher 1

345　Part of this is developing the team so that it's not just happening within my lessons, but
346　across the board so that teachers are feeling empowered and able to create those spaces
347　and have those conversations with students. So the most rewarding moments that I can
348　think of within coaching, and within delivering RSE content is when I have had a really good
349　relationship with the students or the class, but also when I've seen that in other sessions as
350　well, like I've seen students speaking and students doing the majority of the talking rather
351　than the teacher just standing at the front and kind of talking through slides. That's important
352　to me, because they just they switch off and they're not engaged, and you don't know they're
353　learning.

Teacher 3

355　I think the most powerful things when they're able to start to making links between RSE and
356　they're able to link it to the wider world or their own lives and the people around them or
357　friends. In primary we build a culture where there's a safe space to do that.

Teacher 6

359　Just to build on that and bringing the conversations outside of that specific lesson. I found it's
360　helpful to develop a language base of giving students words and terms that they can use to
361　describe how they're feeling in specific moments. So, for me, it's always been really
362　rewarding when you're having a pastoral conversation with a student outside of those
363　lessons and you're able to recall that language, you're able to talk about things like 'deposits
364　and withdrawals' or 'fight flight freeze', 'fact versus opinion', and you being able to use that
365　language to really help students access it. Because in the lesson they can talk hypothetically
366　about all these feelings and emotions and conflicts, but then being able to use that and apply
367　that to real situations outside of the classroom. That's when it's felt really rewarding.

Researcher

369　The next questions are looking at areas of improvement. can you think of anything that
370　would be beneficial to make it enacted in a better way? But also thinking what you might say
371　to other schools to potentially give them some advice about what they could do to improve
372　their RSE curriculum.

Teacher 1

374　In terms of advice for other schools, I mean, the number one thing is developing RSE
375　strategies to focus sessions more about giving students the opportunity to speak. When I
376　see RSE delivered in most schools, its very teacher led and the teacher is just talking
377　through a series of slides and you just see the children of switching off. So that would be my
378　kind of key advice for other schools. In terms of key challenges. For me, the biggest
379　challenge is just time and space within the curriculum and within the school timetable. RSE
380　is normally kind of segregated to maybe one hour a week and that is just it's just not time to
381　cover everything you want to cover. You end up having to be selective, and things that I
382　think are important conversations don't always get the time that they need. So, for example,
383　things like student's relationship with money, I never felt like that was given enough space,
384　because within the curriculum, you're already squeezed tight. And that's even within this
385　school where you have those coaching sessions. Most schools don't have that kind of time
386　at all. So, everything becomes a tick box activity of like 'we've met our statutory

387 requirements, because we've had a half hour session and we've gone through the slides',
388 but it's not quality learning. And that's my main concern.

Teacher 3

390 I also think as well creating a good culture in the room. I think a lot of the time with RSE in
391 other schools it's either done by your form tutor who you don't see that much, and you don't
392 have that proper time with your form tutor or it's done on a collapse day or an enrichment
393 day. When it's basically like which teacher is available. So, I think that can then be tricky,
394 because unless the school has bought your services externally, and external workshops are
395 amazing and I really, really do think that more schools should indulge in, in external
396 workshop support because I think having different voices speaking to students is so
397 important. Because you know, I could be saying the same thing to a kid every day for four
398 months, but somewhat a different voice comes in and says it in a slightly different way and
399 it's hard. But obviously the lack of funding isn't massively supportive of that and I think being
400 a form tutor is never usually someone's priority because they're a subject teacher and that
401 has to come first or they have a different TLR which has to come first, so I think really as
402 annoying, but we've heard it so many times before it does come back to the reason that
403 we're all striking, there isn't the funding to give teachers the time because RSE should be
404 like led by your form tutor because that should be the teacher that you have the best
405 relationship with as a group and it should be the space in which the form tutor can harbour
406 the most the safest space and the best culture. But you're not always given that time to do it.
407 So, I think the way to improve it is to give teachers more space and more time because I
408 think you can give teachers all the tools in the world but if they don't have the time to use it, I
409 think is it's just quite frustrating.

Teacher 4

411 To build on that in terms of the time. I think it's also the time for the training. That's the other
412 thing that's important is that one of the other reasons why teachers don't enjoy teaching it is
413 because they're not confident on the knowledge. So, you know if you're a maths or a history
414 specialist, you enjoy teaching those subjects because you're knowledgeable on our subjects.
415 But people do feel stress teaching sex education because there's so many things that they
416 don't feel confident on how to deliver it. I've experienced that with things like LGBTQ+
417 because people who don't identify within that community often lack knowledge. So, they
418 don't know how to deliver the content and so they need to be trained and taught how to
419 deliver that content. It's crucially important that they are delivering that correctly. So, it's time
420 within the timetable for the students but it's also time to give to training and staff
421 development as well.

Researcher

423 Did you have any input from an educational psychologist?

Teacher (all)

425 All say no.

Researcher

427 Do you think it would have been helpful to have had an EP involvement? And if so, in what
428 way?

Teacher 2

430 I do think it would have been helpful because I think it's always good to get external voices
431 because I think that a lot of the time, you can be a little bit of a victim to your own echo
432 chamber. So, you might think that you have a complete grasp on what your school and your
433 context needs. But I think it would be fascinating to work with an EP. Like, 'so I've got this,

434 this curriculum and what do you think It serves and what do you think it doesn't serve?'. I
435 don't know if it'd be super helpful to have anybody in the planning process of it, but in a
436 redrafting, or a tuning process, I think would be helpful.

Teacher 1

438 Yeah, I think it was interesting, but it's not something I've ever been able to do.

Teacher 2

440 In terms of understanding the dynamics within a class and seeing how it effects certain
441 children or how certain kids might react to it would be helpful.

Teacher 3

443 I completely agree with what has been said. I think it would be helpful in the development,
444 but also, we used to have the mantra that when you're teaching RSE teachers speak less
445 and listen more, but I think we don't always know what we're listening for. So, we want to be
446 listening so we can see exactly assess what the students' needs are. But I think there's lots
447 of details to that that some extra support and training and development on would really
448 support teachers to know exactly what they're listening and looking out for, and then how to
449 support students based on that.

Teacher 4

451 I think just having a bit more guidance from SLT or an EP would be very helpful to make
452 sure that we're covering RSE with them and building that into CPD.

Teacher 6

454 Yeah, I also think in terms of training I think having to tackle with the world of social media
455 and online stuff in terms of like RSE, it has grown at such an exponential speed, and I don't
456 think that any of us are on top of it as much as we should be as educators. So, I think it
457 would be important to focus on specific training around that in terms of pastoral care and in
458 terms of teaching through it through an RSE lens.

Teacher 5

460 My final thought is I think there needs to be more work than to think about RSE from across
461 curricular perspective. We know that we all must teach literature and reading and writing as
462 part of our subjects, that's crucial for every subject. I think the same is true of RSE, we need
463 to be thinking as teachers, we are responsible for the development of the students within our
464 care and that comes into lots of different areas of the curriculum. So, I think, most school
465 departments feel very siloed there's not a lot of conversation about how some of these ideas
466 and topics are being covered in other subject areas. And I think if schools getting that right,
467 then that will really help develop a much more holistic approach. I mean, my more radical
468 thinking on this to get that is that you might need to sacrifice more traditional areas of the
469 curriculum that really don't really have immediate or practical implications for students. So,
470 like, for example, might be controversial. But I think rather than that the students would
471 benefit more from spending time learning about their relationship with money and how they
472 manage money within the Maths Curriculum than they would learning about you know,
473 trigonometry. Trigonometry has less immediate applications for those students. That's only
474 one example, but I mean, within all subject areas there are lots of examples of that. But
475 yeah, it's just thinking about cross curricular and being more holistic, essentially.

476

7.5.2 Secondary school teacher focus group

1 **Researcher**

2 So, the first question is how is RSE or relationship and sex education taught in your school?

3 **Teacher 1**

4 It's taught through lessons of coaching, where different topics from the curriculum are taught
5 to different year groups, depending on the age and their need.

6 **Teacher 4**

7 Yeah, it's also taught as part of a curriculum, like at any time in the year in certain year
8 groups, or there are some year groups as well, where it's taught explicitly like this is our RSE
9 term and this is the focus.

10 **Researcher**

11 Can someone tell me because I don't know what it is, but what is coaching at your school?

12 **Teacher 3**

13 So coaching is like traditional PSHE, or Tutor Time, but with more of a slightly different
14 pedagogy behind it involving the use of oracy techniques, comprehension skills, use of
15 grounding texts, and encouraging self-reflection through things like journaling or through
16 conversation with that the large group and conversations with smaller group.

17 **Teacher 2**

18 Yeah, and I guess it's different to a normal school because they might have lessons of PSE
19 or PSHE. But we have lessons of coaching, where we open different topics that might be
20 relevant to them, or might be set on the curriculum, for them to discuss and have open
21 conversations about educating them as well as allowing them to have a space and a voice to
22 speak about their feelings.

23 **Teacher 6**

24 it is like an open forum, and we encourage the students are able to ask sort really difficult
25 questions and that's where we can have those rich discussions. So, they play a really key
26 part in really in our planning around it, because what we would do is, we'd encourage them
27 to openly talk about what they know and what they don't know and, and we sort of try and
28 encourage a culture where that is a respected safe space. So, it creates a culture where we
29 can have those really difficult conversations.

30 **Researcher**

31 Question 2. So, if you have delivered any part of RSE, what support have you been given to
32 help you do that?

33 **Teacher 2**

34 So, I'd say support we've been given is from coaching leads, who are the people who set the
35 curriculum. Also, people who are in our coaching group, we meet and discuss what we're
36 going to set and what we're going to plan and how we're going to talk about sort of sensitive
37 subjects or tackle different issues that we're having to face with them.

38 **Teacher 1**

39 Also, for myself, as quite a new teacher to the profession. I've had support from people in my
40 coaching team who have taught RSE before.

Teacher 3

it's also briefly touched upon in teacher training. I don't think it is heavily focused on because most of the teacher training, we do at university is focused on the subjects that we're specializing in. But I do remember briefly touching on being expected to teach PSHE as part of the curriculum, even in free schools like with our curriculum it is a bit more open, but we are still responsible and legally must teach certain topics under that.

Teacher 5

Moving into number 3. What else might you do to develop a good RSE curriculum? So, I'm thinking of things like have you tried to listen to the young person's voice and making the curriculum for what they value in RSE? in terms of how you've delivered RSE lessons and content, what strategies and methods are you using?

Teacher 6

Yeah, I'd say that we do that as long alongside the curriculum that's been set for us. There's definitely spaced to invite in current issues that are happening particularly within that year group, either to do with behaviour or to do with peer on peer abuse, which was something that flared up a little bit a few years ago, where there were students that were disclosing that other students weren't acting in a professional way towards them, and it was making them feel uncomfortable. So, then that's something that we have a space to address in those coaching sessions and run a session on it. Also, mental health and COVID seemed to be quite bad. I remember, I and another teacher were teaching lessons on depression and feelings and how they're coping with a lot of people that may have passed away in their families and grief. Those were all obviously, on the curriculum, but probably they were best suited to having those lessons straight after COVID, because it was more relevant for the students.

Teacher 4

There is something that we've that is recent in what we've been doing. We've had some difficult relationships at school. So, we're talking about healthy and unhealthy relationships. So, what we've done is taught a lesson and we gave some information and we actually gave the kids a form, like a survey to fill out and in that they were able to ask you independently without anybody else seeing anything they were asking only we would see it and questions that they would feel awkward about asking us in front of others. It gave them this good opportunity to really bulk down on the questions that they want answered. What we see from that is that quite a lot of the same issues were arising from different students and that allows us to tailor the follow up session to answer their questions without having to pinpoint who asked us that in the first place.

Researcher

Question 4: In terms of looking at delivering sensitive topics and RSE, how might you as teachers try and think about approaching them, but also delivering them to the wide range of students you have? So, a sensitive topic might be looking at diversity of in RSE, looking at consent at different ages, LGBTQ+, etc., how might you deliver these sensitive topics?

Teacher 2

I think ways that we've dealt with it before are going into the lesson and saying, 'we're not experts on this topic' and 'everyone in this room has had a different experience up until the point of coming into this room' so we all need to be respectful and understanding of everyone else's views and opinions, but also allow it to be a safe space for people to feel comfortable. So, for example, I haven't had the same upbringing you've had, and you haven't had the same upbringing from the person next to you. But none of us need to be experts to educate each other and to learn from each other. So, it's, yeah, it's more about

89 opening up a safe space where everyone feels comfortable and even accepting that you in
90 that situation and even though you might be leading the lesson, you're not an expert on that
91 child's life, you're just guiding them forwards and educating them further on them on
92 whatever the matter is.

Teacher 3

94 I also think as well, kind of like, to that, I found that not acting as if I haven't experienced any
95 of the stuff that's discussed in RSE has helped create that safe space. I'm not standing in
96 front of the class and saying 'I've had STIs' but I'm also not sitting there denying anything
97 either.

Teacher 1

99 I think it's also important that if there is sort of any behaviour or comments that could make
100 anybody feel uncomfortable, because in reality that can happen. It's important that other
101 students see you challenge in the way that that happens, and making sure that everybody
102 knows that they will feel absolutely safe saying something. Because if anybody does
103 comment, the teacher is going to challenge that and remind them that this is a safe space.
104 So, I think it's important that every student feels confident that they are going to be
105 supported with whatever they say or might feel silly saying. So, they feel they are going to be
106 respected within that space.

Teacher 6

108 Yeah, just add on to that. They need to know where the boundary is for sensitive topics. So,
109 a lot of the time I remember from last year, setting up maybe potentially putting a trigger
110 warning up and if you need if you would need to leave the room then that is that's doable,
111 but also if you say something that is deemed inappropriate or not like not nice to other
112 students then you may be asked to leave the room. So just setting those clear boundaries. I
113 think because we had the same sort of slide up, if it was a sensitive topic, they knew to take
114 it a bit more seriously. As it was going to be a bit more of a deeper topic to be delving into.
115 So, they sat up and behaved a little bit more appropriately.

Researcher

117 If we look at a bit more delivering topics, in terms of how you work with parents, not just with
118 RSE, obviously their focus on that. But when you're trying to get them to encourage their
119 children to opt into RSE, how have you done that or work with them?

Teacher 5

121 There's been forums and meetings that have been held by senior leadership team, where
122 they invite all of the parents of year 6 or they invite all the parents of year 8, depending on
123 whether something will be coming up in RSE that half term, particularly talking about sex and
124 talking about safe sex with younger children. For a lot of parents, they deem that to be
125 inappropriate, if it's not in keeping with their culture or their religion, but SLT have filtered it
126 down to us, which I think is the best way for it to be dealt with that. This is a compulsory topic
127 on our curriculum, and it's something that every child in England is legally required to learn
128 about. So, although it may not sit in line, ideally, with some of the views that they have,
129 within their household, it is something that whilst they're at school, and we're looking after
130 their children that is something that they are expected to and legally required to learn.

Teacher 1

132 Building on to what has been said, that has been the message that we've been passed
133 down. it's also been an offer from the senior leadership team. Whereas if we don't feel
134 comfortable having that conversation with parents, because it is quite a direct line of part of
135 this is legally what we need to teach them. And if that is going to be a difficult conversation

136   with a parent, we've been offered that sort of coaching leaders would be able to have that
137   discussion. I know that's happened in the past.

Teacher 2

139   Yeah, I know that as well, just sending letters home. So being quite open about what the
140   content has been covered is also explaining that it there is the option to opt out, but we
141   encourage all people to get that education.

Researcher

143   Next question, then is asking, looking at the program itself? How have you developed the
144   programs and what sources have you used to make the curriculum

Teacher 4

146   So, I remember when we were planning some sessions before, we have looked into some
147   sort of sort of open spaces in terms of TES. And I know, I've looked at things like BBC
148   bitesize, which has been generally what the rest of the country would be teaching and what
149   is appropriate for age groups. Because I know for me looking at what other people have
150   done before is helpful.

Teacher 5

152   I remember, the one of the coaching leads, who was a co-coach in our year group was
153   setting us off on the curriculum. We were helping to plan when we would teach things and
154   there was, there's a big list of 30 or 35 standards that you must meet from different sections
155   within PSHE. Some would be to do with sexual relationships, some are just to do with
156   relationships, some has to do with sex and loads of different things on there. Then when it
157   was planning, which ones are appropriate for our year group, and then when would be the
158   appropriate time to teach them in the year and are they mature enough at this point to learn
159   there. So, there was a set of standards that we had to make sure that we were hitting by the
160   time they leave in year 11. So obviously, the coaching leads mainly take ownership of that,
161   but it was filtered down so that we were given the ones that we should have taught by the
162   end of year seven, and then by the end of year eight so by the time they get to the end of
163   year 11. They've touched on every single one of those points.

Teacher 1

165   We also looked at these standards and were able to tailor it to each of our classes. Because
166   our classes were in very different stages in terms of maturity and what us as teachers
167   knowing your students and knowing at that time what really, they do need to be covering. I
168   remember we rated it as 'red, amber or green' as to what we thought was appropriate for our
169   class at that time.

Teacher 2

171   It is that big, long list of what everyone in the country follows that everyone has to be taught
172   by the end of year 11. So, I guess it's deciding what's relevant at the time and then making
173   sure that every single one is hit and checking at the end of the year 'did we cover this' 'does
174   it need to be delved deeper into?'

Researcher

176   Question 6, What has gone well with delivering RSE, so you've spoken about how it's done
177   in coaching, and it sounds like you have extra resources, and you get the child's voice, but if
178   anything else, in terms of delivery, what has gone?

Teacher 5

180 I think that some of the subtopics that we've taught, either whether we've taught them last
181 minute, or whether we've planned to teach that particular topic, we've seen a real impact in
182 the student's behaviour, and their sort maturity in whatever stage of their school life they're
183 at. Each year, I stayed in the same year group for two years, we've kind of homed in our
184 skills, and things that went well that we year before and things that could go better. So, each
185 year, it's got better and better when we teach it to them. But you can see that the topic that
186 you're teaching at the time does have an impact on friendships and the feeling and then
187 feeling that they can come and speak to us, which is all the things in a school that we want
188 students to do and to feel safe at school. So, you can definitely say that some of the things
189 that you teach do have a big impact on the students after you've taught them.

Teacher 6

191 Yeah, I agree. You see an openness of students after that. It showed they've listened, and
192 they trust you. They understand the things that you've been saying. So, they will start
193 coming to you with other problems that they're having. That to me, says that they've really
194 valued what you've taught them in that lesson.

Researcher

196 In contrast to that, so you said things that could have gone quite well. But would there be
197 any areas of improvement for RSE? So, I'm thinking of like, trying to deliver challenging
198 topics? Or if you're going to say to other schools, about how you've done it quite well, what
199 might you say to them?

Teacher 1

201 I think that it's important to just choose the right topics for the students that you're teaching. I
202 remember a topic that we talked about on mental health, and it was one of those where the
203 students might have not thought it was like a sensitive topic. But it was one of those lessons
204 where we put a trigger warning up on the board, in terms of saying this is going to be quite a
205 serious lesson. So please try and make sure that you are engaged and sensible and then
206 they just haven't been. So, behaviour has been quite rocky, which derails the lesson,
207 unfortunately, and takes away from the seriousness of that lesson. So, I think it's all about
208 making sure that what you're teaching is not only what you're supposed to be teaching, but
209 also you're teaching it at the right rate or time for that class. Because otherwise, it just you're
210 sending out a lesson that's not really hitting on the right notes.

Teacher 3

212 I think as well just like allowing more time to plan and tune the sessions, rather than kind of
213 just rushing into them. Also, making sure that there's enough thoughtful planning going into
214 it.

Teacher 2

216 in all honesty, I think we have been met with quite a lot of challenges. I particularly
217 remember, there was a lesson I was teaching around LGBTQ and different terms that you
218 can use. And I remember I am thinking if the students aren't in the right place, mentally and
219 maturity and even at that time of the day, it can really impact on how willing they are to be
220 open to be listening and be learning, because that can sometimes really, really derail and
221 take away from the learning from other students in that class at that time.

Researcher

223 Question 7, have you ever had an educational psychologist involved in the planning of RSE?

Teacher (all)

225 Collective no from all participants

226 **Researcher**

227 So, if you were to have an EP involved, do you think it would be helpful to have one? And if
228 so, in what way?

229 **Teacher 1**

230 I definitely think it would. They've got such a speciality of expertise in terms of knowing
231 relevant and current information about for children's mental health and for what they need to
232 learn in RSE. I think that the more expertise that are offered in schools should always be
233 welcomed. So, I think there's definitely space for that to be encouraged in schools and for
234 teachers to learn from specific specialists on topics like this.

235 **Teacher 3**

236 Yeah, 100%, I think that often, when we're teaching RSE, particularly the relationship side of
237 things, the students that most need to access to that are the students that are struggling the
238 most to understand it. So particularly if you're thinking about things like conflict resolution as
239 like a classic example. The students that are accessing the content are the students that
240 probably least need to understand the content. Whereas the most vulnerable students that
241 are really struggling with conflict resolution, a lot of what we teach, I think, within RSE, just
242 goes in one ear and out the other. It's not really heard and understood by those most
243 vulnerable students.

244 **Teacher 5**

245 I think that children are also genuinely interested into the psychology of different
246 relationships. I work with teachers who have a background in psychology and give some
247 context to why some relationships could form. I think they are genuinely interested in being
248 able to understand certain elements or psychology at a deeper level.

249 **Teacher 6**

250 I think there's never a space in schools where they shouldn't learn more about themselves
251 and about other people and how they work and how other people work, which is obviously
252 what is the focus of everything that you learn in psychology. So, I think there's definitely
253 room for it and to come from an educational psychologist specifically would be really
254 impactful.

255 **Teacher 2**

256 I think it's also about educating the teachers themselves. Because I think there is a lack of
257 understanding a lot of the students that struggle the most, they're just seen as problems, or
258 they're issue is seen as behaviour. And yes, that of their behaviour that they exhibit might be
259 challenging. But underneath it all, there are there are elements that they're struggling with in
260 terms of relationships. And if the teachers don't understand what's going on and can't relate
261 to what's going on, how are we going to be able to teach them and support them?

262 **Teacher 4**

263 I think also to have someone come in that's coming with fresh eyes and coming in with a
264 really specific skill set towards students like that. It's something that teachers and students
265 would benefit from.

7.6 Appendix 6: Transcript from student focus groups

7.6.1 Primary school students focus group (year 6)

1 **Researcher**

2 The first question is how do you think the RSE is preparing you for as you get older? So, at
3 that moment, you're in year six, you're going to have RSE, as you get older. You had it last
4 year, you might have had it before. You've covered things like puberty, relationships,
5 friendships, how do you think is making you get ready as you go into year 7 and beyond?

6 **Student 1**

7 Because it happens to you when you get older, like relationships. Because let's say if you
8 didn't get told about RSE, and something happened to you, and you didn't know what was
9 happening in you and you might think something's wrong with you. But if you knew, then
10 you'd be able to know how to deal with it.

11 **Student 4**

12 Building on to that, I also agree that you need it when you grow older because when it
13 happens to you, you're going to feel like you're not you or your unique, and it's just
14 happening to you or maybe it's like a problem and you want it to stop.

15 **Student 3**

16 I feel RSE prepares you for real life as I know if something happens, say a stranger comes
17 up to me and says, 'do you want come to my house'. I think I know not to go because I don't
18 know them. So now I feel safer.

19 **Researcher**

20 Question 2: What has been the best part of being taught RSE? So, think about your
21 teachers, what they've taught, you where it's done in this school, what's been the best part of
22 RSE?

23 **Student 2**

24 I think that the teachers are really nice, and they don't tell you like directly, like, 'you're going
25 to have a period', they describe it and then they show you what it is, and you get more from
26 it as It's more descriptive, and so you get to know.

27 **Researcher**

28 Ok, so the teachers help you because you have a good relationship with them.

29 **Student 3**

30 Yeah, they make you feel comfortable.

31 **Researcher**

32 Why do they make you feel comfortable?

33 **Student 2**

34 Well, their voice can be comforting rather than like 'no! don't this!'. But most of the time it's
35 very comforting, for example, if you are in trouble, they take you outside and have a talk with
36 you, and don't shout at you in the middle class and embarrass you.

37 Researcher

38 When they make you feel comfortable does that make you feel like you want to do RSE
39 more? or do you feel more comfortable talking about things if they're comfortable with you?

40 Student 1

41 Yeah definitely.

42 Student 4

43 Also, I think the best part was probably when you get to know more information as It's good
44 because you know what's coming up, and you know what you're going to experience and so
45 it's not unexpected, or anything that you shouldn't fear or afraid of.

46 Researcher

47 Question 3. So, I want you to imagine that you are making the RSE curriculum. So, when I
48 say curriculum, it's what you are being taught. So, for example, in maths, you get taught
49 about multiplication, addition, that's the curriculum. If we're going to plan it today, what topics
50 would you want to have in the RSE curriculum?

51 Student 6

52 For both boys and girls, like period for girls, and for boys, you get when you grow, the
53 teacher told us that they get some white stuff coming from the boys. I think I would teach
54 them the things like that.

55 Researcher

56 Would you want boys and girls to be taught together? Or separately?

57 Student 5

58 I think set separately because when we were taught it in year 5 the boys, they kept
59 sniggering.

60 Student 4

61 Yeah, they kept laughing even though they're going through it too.

62 Student 2

63 I think only together if they are nice and respected to the girls.

64 Student 1

65 Yeah, because some boys don't respect us, like when things that will happen to us girls are
66 being taught, boys laugh and make jokes and say things like 'oh my gosh, you guys are so
67 weird'. Or 'Why does this happen?'.

68 Researcher

69 So, would it be better to have boys and girls together so they can learn about each other?

70 Student 3

71 I guess, sometimes it depends on the topic, like what are periods? or sex?

72 Researcher

73 So, what other topics might you want? So, what about in terms of like friendships and
74 relationships? What would you like to be taught about when it comes to friendships and
75 relationships?

Student 5

I would like to know how to make friends.

Student 1

To learn how you can always trust one another and how to make friends, as sometimes they aren't always real.

Researcher

Have you heard about toxic friendships?

Student 4

So, a toxic friendship is basically when a friendship doesn't really work out and let's say you guys just don't get along, or you don't treat each other the same way or how you would want to treat yourself. So, let's say one person is being rude to someone continuously, but that person doesn't have any friends and doesn't want to let go. So, it's quite toxic because that person is treating someone bad and that will make them uncomfortable.

Student 3

I agree with her. When people are rude to you, it's better that you're not rude back because then will think you're a bad person. It's better to not retaliate, because then you're going to be rude.

Researcher

Question 4. How do you feel when it comes to having RSE about sensitive topics? So, a sensitive topic is something that some people don't want to talk about? So, for example, boys might not want to talk about periods. But when they come up in RSE, how do you feel when it comes up?

Student 6

I guess If you don't want to talk about RSE normally, like periods, it would be better to talk about it in in RSE lessons. Because then you'll learn more about even though lots of people don't really talk about it, but in RSE, it always gets bought up so you can add to your understanding.

Student 2

I think it's good, because we're still young so if anyone needs anything we know what to do. For example, the school nurse, they give out free period pads and things like that and have different things when people are not comfortable with it.

Student 5

I think when boys want to talk about periods or something maybe you can do in your own private lesson for only girls. But it's better that boys do know, because then they know what girls go through and don't make fun of them because blood is coming out of them.

Researcher

How do you feel about RSE at this school? How would you describe it?

Student 4

Its good! it's committed and good.

Researcher

116   What do you mean by committed? It's a good word, but what do you mean by?

Student 4

118   So, if you get RSE they'll be really committed in helping you, like a change of clothes if
119   something happens to you or they will give you some pads if you don't have them and we're
120   made to feel it's okay and not be embarrassed about it.

Student 3

122   I think it's depending on the topic because if it's about both girls and boys meeting up
123   together then, they tell us a lot about it. I'd say some parents don't like it as they think we are
124   too young for it. But I think it's good for us to know, because some people on their period
125   right now and so we need to know because it happens at different ages.

Researcher

127   So, the teachers that deliver it, the teachers that give you RSE, how have they been with it?
128   How do you find them?

Student 6

130   So personally, I find it nice, because they don't do it in a rude way or anything. They deliver it
131   really nicely and they give a lot of information about it, and they give the right information for
132   our ages for us to know right now.

Student 2

134   They say it in a way to make you feel like you don't need to be embarrassed about it or
135   what's about what happens to you, so you don't need to be like scared. You can also feel
136   like trustworthy of them because I feel you can speak to a teacher, and they can help you.

Researcher

138   Perfect. So, you're going to start year 7 next year. Do you feel ready to continue with RSE
139   for the next phase of your learning? do you feel comfortable going into year seven?

Student (all)

141   Collectively say yes.

Researcher

143   Do you think you can talk to your teachers here?

Student 2

145   Yeah, I would say so. It does depend on the teacher, and it depends if I'm comfortable with
146   saying it to them.

Student 3

148   I agree with her because it depends on one gender for me. I do talk to male teachers
149   because you can say you're on your lady's day'. But some male teachers are okay, but other
150   male teachers are a bit nerve wracking because let's say that they're strict, then it makes
151   you nervous to tell them.

Student 6

153   I wish I knew more kind teachers.

Student 1

155 I guess I do feel ok speaking with male teachers, but I guess I feel a bit like wait to tell them
156 about what's happening with girl things all the time, I guess it feels a bit weird. So, I feel
157 more comfortable telling girls rather than boys.

158 **Student 4**

159 I appreciate some boys, even though they can be like children because one of my friends, a
160 boy, asked me if I was on my period and I said no. But then he asked, what is a period? And
161 then I explained to him and then he really respected me, and they say that they will respect
162 girls.

163 **Researcher**

164 So, your parents/carers agreed for you to take part today. Why did they agree for you to take
165 part?

166 **Student 2**

167 They said that you need this because when you grow older, you're going to go through this.

168 **Student 3**

169 Yeah, my mum said we have to learn about it so that when the future comes, we know
170 what's going on and know what we're doing.

171 **Student 6**

172 Yeah, at first, my mum was not okay with it because she said I'm too young, apparently. But
173 then after I explained to her what was going on? And that my cousin got her period little, she
174 was like, 'oh, never mind, you can go because I want you to learn about it'.

175 **Student 1**

176 My mum didn't really want me to do it as well. But when I explained to her, she agreed, and
177 she was fine with me like learning about it.

178 **Researcher**

179 Final question to ask is, is there anything else you want to say today about RSE at this
180 school?

181 **Student 1 (all)**

182 Collective nos.

7.6.2 Secondary school students focus group (year 11)

1 **Researcher**

2 Question one, how do you feel the RSE is preparing you as you get older?

3 **Student 1**

4 I think it helps you to make informed decisions for when you're older, and to not be a bit
5 reckless with your life.

6 **Student 3**

7 I think it also helps you be prepared for the possible consequences of having sex when
8 you're older, and being really informed about what to do, and how not to panic.

9 **Student 5**

10 I feel that it's helping us understand how relationships works. If it's in a friendly way, or an
11 intimate way, I think it just helps in general to make you be able to be healthier and not so
12 toxic.

13 **Student 6**

14 I feel like with RSE, it teaches us that no matter how old you get, people will be curious, and
15 it just eliminates that fact of curiosity because you do know what's going to happen. So, it
16 helps people make an informative decision.

17 **Student 2**

18 I also think it helps you to find what you would want in a relationship and what makes you
19 happy as well, so you don't end up going into bad relationships.

20 **Student 4**

21 I think it allows for people to be open to other sorts of relationships. So, for example the
22 media portrays that there's only one sort of relationship, like a boy and girls, that's all. But us
23 having RSE, I've learned that there is quite a lot of variation. So, for example, gay, lesbian,
24 and then there's also other relationships that I didn't know about. So, I think that's something
25 I've learned quite a bit about.

26 **Student 6**

27 I agree. I feel like with RSE, specifically focusing on the relationship part, it opens that
28 question of about sexuality, and it helps people figure out what they might not be
29 understanding, and, with open relationships it eliminates that effect of being toxic, and
30 saying yes to things that you generally don't want to do.

31 **Researcher**

32 Let's do question two, then. So, what would you say has been the best part of being to RSE?
33 So obviously, you've been taught the curriculum from maybe a bit in year 11 and going back
34 down to year 9. What would you say from your personal understand has been the best part.

35 **Student 2**

36 with learning RSE throughout school, at first, everyone thought it would just be about sex.
37 But then learning the relationship side, we found out there's so much more to consent and
38 where people can say yes without giving consent. Because you must look at their body
39 language in general. The best part of it would be the step up to being considered young
40 adults, instead of us just been schoolchildren that gets told off all the time.

Student 3

42 I think it helps you to understand your teachers as well, because they open a bit to you,
43 when you talk about RSE, so it just helps you to understand that different life choices for
44 different people.

Student 4

46 I think the best part is not talking about the actual sex, it's about how you come across to it.
47 So, talking about consent and how you give consent to somebody, that helps you in life as
48 well, because you have to communicate to a lot of people when you're older. And it gives
49 you a lot of like responsibility.

Student 1

51 I think the best part I've been taught is how your bond between your friends and mates have
52 changed. Because for example, if I was in year six, and year seven, and asked to talk about
53 just sex, then it would just be all laughs and giggles. But now in year 11, we're able to
54 comfortably talk about it, in the sense that it's nothing to be laughed about, but it's something
55 that's quite normal and this was definitely something that I'm more comfortable with.

Student 6

57 I think that it was important also outlining the effects of unprotected sex. Yeah, it can
58 happen, with STIs and things like that.

Student 5

60 Also, with the STIs and stuff, we learn about it in science, like gonorrhoea, etc. However,
61 learning about it in coaching and form time, it makes it more human rather than scientific or
62 alien like or that can never happen. Because rather than comparing evolution to an STI or
63 something else, it makes it human knowing it actually happens and knowing the
64 consequences if we do have unprotected sex.

Student 2

66 I think another very good part is the real-life scenarios. So, for example, I never would have
67 thought that I'd get in a scenario where alcohol could be involved in sex or a relationship. But
68 then when I learned more about how I learn that if you're drunk, then things can go horribly
69 wrong. So, RSE can help us with other future situations that we may struggle to get
70 ourselves out of.

Researcher

72 Okay, so question three. So, you've already told me a few things that you do get taught. So,
73 we've touched upon things like STIs, but if you were to maybe plan your own sex education
74 curriculum, what would you want to see in order to see the benefits for you?

Student 3

76 We learn a lot about contraception, I feel like the first term was just based on contraception
77 and how important is and how different it was, and I didn't know that that both parties should
78 be on contraception. Because normally, typically, it's a man that brings a contraception and
79 the woman should be on the pill, however a woman can do other things to protect
80 themselves as well. I feel like that's what's needed in RSE curriculum, because if I didn't
81 know that that means there's 1000s of people that don't know.

Student 4

83 I think that curriculum should just be normalized a lot more, because I think quite a lot of the
84 time it can be frowned upon or there are very strong opinions when it comes to this sort of
85 education. So, I think there should be more normalized and knowing that sex happens.

Student 1

87 Well because of the age that teachers are teaching us, they can make it negative, and telling
88 us 'Don't have sex now' or 'you need to be ready' etc. But I feel like they should not make it
89 so negative, but you should make it's positive. Obviously warn us that at this age, we
90 shouldn't be doing certain things, but make it so you wouldn't never want to do it in the
91 future.

Researcher

93 Is that something you feel the curriculum does now that it uses scare tactics of 'you shouldn't
94 do this'; you should do this?'

Student (all)

96 Nods in agreement

Student 3

98 I think effects on potentially watching some inappropriate content and how it can affect
99 relationships. So, the effects of looking at pornography and material that could obviously
100 have an impact.

Student 2

102 Yeah, before we came in, we were talking about how sex is not a taboo topic to talk about.
103 However, the way teachers come across with it can be wrong. For example, they say 'we're
104 going to be talking about the birds and the bees' or these consent videos, where it's
105 animation and very childlike. So, it's almost like you're treating us like adults by talking about
106 this topic, but you're demeaning us by giving us cartoons when you can just talk to us give
107 us informative videos that are actually factual and skip the long talk and sugar-coating it
108 because real people have sex, people can contract sexual diseases and other things. But
109 like, you can teach us how to prevent that in a mature way.

Student 4

111 So, I feel like teachers shouldn't say things like 'don't have sex; because it can happen. I feel
112 it should be more focused on what you should do If you do have sex. If we look at the topic
113 of pregnancy and pregnancy scares, you'd want to listen to a person who's experienced it
114 much more compared to just a teacher. Because there's a high chance that you experience
115 the same emotions as, as a person going through it.

Researcher

117 Is that something you've done here? Have they ever got people in to teach you?

Student 1

119 It's only been the teachers.

Researcher

121 Is that something you feel might be beneficial? if you've got external people in for RSE?

Students (all)

123 They nod and say yes in agreement.

124   Researcher

125   How do you feel when it comes to having RSE about a sensitive topic? So, let's just break
126   that down a little bit. In RSE, there will be topics which are maybe a bit taboo or a bit hard to
127   talk about, and they obviously are going to have to be spoken about, how do you feel when
128   they come up? And how do you feel when you're being taught those topics in RSC?

129   Student 1

130   With sensitive topics I feel like as a collective, we don't really care about the sex part.
131   However, when, for instance, in one lesson we were talking about consent, about sexual
132   assault, sexual harassment, and rape. I felt like the teacher should have come across with a
133   bit more of a trigger warning because they don't know what people have been through. I
134   know that certain people were very comfortable and uncomfortable in the session and had to
135   leave the classroom because it was just too much to hear at that time, because of personal
136   experiences or maybe they know people that have been through that. So, I feel like we have
137   sensitive topics and yes, rape is real, we should listen, we should know about it, and not how
138   to avoid it, because no one can avoid it. But we should know, about simple things. Such as if
139   you are going out, like in a club, and you have a drink, don't leave that drink, don't come
140   back to have that drink, because it might be spiked, just get a new one, or just finish it before
141   you go to the toilet.

142   Student 3

143   I think when it times to have sensitive topic talks, we should go into smaller groups, or we
144   should even be able to pick our groups that will talk about it. Because we're not going to feel
145   comfortable talking about these things with every single person in the room. Especially with
146   the different experiences you've had with these people. Or even maybe have these topics on
147   a one to one, depending on who you are.

148   Student 4

149   I feel when we talk about sensitive topics, protocols should be followed very strictly. Because
150   obviously, there are quite a lot of people in each year group, so all it takes is for that one
151   person to say something wrong for the whole class to go to shambles. So, I feel it would be
152   better if protocols are followed extremely strictly to make sure that there is a balance of
153   maturity and comfortability is sustained.

154   Researcher

155   Before we get into question five, in terms of what you've had for RSE, how have you found it
156   at this school so far, if you were to describe it, in terms of the people who deliver it, the
157   content, how it's done, what's good, and maybe bad about it.

158   Student 6

159   I feel like with the school, and having spoken to friends outside of school, it's different here.
160   It works because other schools have just completely scrapped it. Or They have been like,
161   'Oh, sex is when a man and woman have sex' or 'Sex is when a penis penetrates a vagina'
162   and 'you can get pregnant' and 'you should use contraception' but it's don't over one week or
163   one session. But with this school, it goes on throughout the curriculum because it is very
164   much important. Also, this school does it differently because I feel like maybe it's because
165   our school is small, and the teachers and students get along very well, and they know each
166   other on a personal level. So, it means that sometimes teachers, if they feel comfortable,
167   may share personal experiences making it more real. They tell us to always trust your gut
168   feelings and offer advice, instead of it being like on slides and it just feels more personal.

169   Student 2

170 I think this school has an interesting way of making us remember, because I remember one
171 time, we did a game and we had to say what the disease was, what effects do you have
172 from it, and how can you get it. I remember we had like a little competition between the
173 class, so if you could finish the table first. I remember, obviously, because it was one of the
174 fun moments even though what we were learning about was a little bit scary. I felt like we
175 had fun with it, and we were able to absorb the knowledge as well as not feeling bad about
176 it.

Student 2

178 Yeah, so things like having games to make it a bit more competitive, good relationships with
179 teachers with real live experiences, and not making it so regimented and based on
180 PowerPoint slides.

Student 5

182 I feel because we had it for a whole term, that was good, so having it throughout year 9 and
183 throughout year 10.

Student 1

185 Yeah, and questions are encouraged. So, curiosity is not brought down and it's not like, 'Oh,
186 this is it, you can't ask questions' which I think happens when you have teachers who are
187 uncomfortable. Whereas, with this school, teacher want you to ask questions, because they
188 would rather you be safe than sorry and not use Google as it might not have the answers,
189 but actual humans can.

Student 3

191 I agree. But also, in a sense of how diverse the teachers are. In the school, obviously, we
192 have like a wide range of teachers in terms of race, sexuality, in terms of gender, etc. and a
193 mix of experiences. So, they're able to sort of give us an insight as to what might not actually
194 be in the curriculum, but things you still need to know, I think that's something that really
195 helped us.

Researcher

197 Okay, final question. You're coming to the end of your like curriculum and you're about to go
198 into your next phase, you've had RSE from year 9 and year 10, you will have more year 11.
199 So, looking at the last question, do you think that you've got enough information from your
200 RSE teaching to make informed choices? Do you feel you're well equipped to go into the
201 real world and understand RSE?

Student 4

203 Yes, I feel the curriculum so far has been about information how RSE works, it's about how
204 to make informed decision, like consent, how to spot when a situation is fishy. I know that
205 after Christmas break, we're going back to RSE for more of the scientific stuff.

Student 2

207 Yeah, I'd agree. I feel I'm ready for the real world and making good choices.

Researcher

209 Is there anything else you want to add about RSE? Or how you think is going to school?
210 Anything you think you haven't said that might be useful to add to my research.

Student 6

212 I feel like other schools should take notes with the fact that we are 15/16 years old, and we
213 have access to technology, we do know what sex is and at the end of the day, you being
214 more awkward about it for your own sake is bit selfish. I understand, you don't want to talk to
215 a whole group of teenagers about sex, but it's something that you've got to do. A lot of
216 teachers say, 'We didn't have this when we were growing up' So then that's a problem that
217 you should fix.

Student 2

219 I feel like our school does a lot of surveys to know how we are. So, if the other schools just
220 ask their students 'what do you actually need to know about?' or 'What don't you know?' I
221 feel that that would be very beneficial.

Student 4

223 Also, I feel it helps with having a trusted relationship between students and teachers. I
224 remember for instance, two girls in our year group an idea group made a survey for all the
225 students and they asked, 'Have you ever felt uncomfortable by teachers?' or 'Have you ever
226 been sexually harassed in the school?' and it was all anonymous. I thought that really put
227 teachers and students together because teachers and students may have been going
228 through the same things. But giving that feeling of adulthood to students and the freedom of
229 speech to the students is important. So other schools could convey their own survey to see
230 what's going on in your school and you can try to fix the problem and it's more about
231 partnership rather than a hierarchy between student and teacher.

1. How is RSE or relationship and sex education taught in your school		2. what support have you been given to help you enact RSE?	
Code	*Frequency*	*Code*	*Frequency*
Coaching curriculum	III	Support from coaching leads	III
Specific times in the term	II	Teacher Training and modelling	III
Cross-curricular	I	Use of D*f*E resources and literature	II
Use of oracy techniques	III	RSE checklists	II
		Ongoing discussions	III

3. in terms of how you've delivered RSE lessons and content, what strategies and methods are you using?		4. How do you approach and deliver sensitive topics in RSE?	
Code	*Frequency*	*Code*	*Frequency*
Use of student voice	IIII	Non-expert approach	I
Small year groups	I	Creating positive cultures and safe spaces	IIIII
Knowledge of local area	I	Ground rules	IIII
Multimedia approach	IIII	Bringing lived experiences	IIII
responsiveness from teachers	I	Diversity ambassadors	II
		Informing parents	II

5. How have you worked with parents to encourage them their children to opt into RSE?		6. What do you think has gone well with enacting it in the schools?	
Code	*Frequency*	*Code*	*Frequency*
Open forums	III	Pre-emptive work before RSE	IIIII
Communication from SLT to teachers	III	Developing a safe space	II
Open information about specific content	IIII	Developing a team	I
Individual meetings with parents	II	Good relationship with students	IIII
		Links with real world living	II
		Using language and oracy	II

7. But would there be any areas of improvement for RSE?		8. Do you think it would have been helpful to have had an EP involvement and if so, how?	
Prepare by giving trigger warnings	I	Speciality of expertise knowledge	III
More time to plan	IIII	Understanding psychology of relationships	III
Right time for students to receive RSE	II	Educating teachers	II
Specific teachers to deliver RSE	III	Fresh perspectives	II
Better training for teachers	IIII		

7.7 Appendix 7: Codes and themes from teacher focus groups

Theme	Colour Code (frequency)
1. Tailored curriculum	7 (17)
2. Being responsive to students needs	13 (36)
3. Being responsive to teachers needs	13 (34)
4. Good communication to make the enactment of RSE better	8 (25)

7.8 Appendix 8: Codes and themes from student focus groups

1. How do you think the RSE is preparing you for as you get older?		2. What has been the best part of being taught RSE?	
Code	Frequency	Code	Frequency
Managing situations	III	Building teacher relationships	II
Not feeling alone	I	Getting information	I
Prepare for variety of relationships	IIIII	Transition into adulthood	I
Eliminate curiosity	I	Sense of responsibility	I
Informed decisions	II	Building peer relationships	I
		Learning about sex	II
		Real life examples	II

3. If we're going to plan it today, what topics would you want to have in the RSE curriculum?		4. How do you feel when it comes to having RSE about sensitive topics?	
Code	Frequency	Code	Frequency
Same-sex teaching	I	Safe space to open up	II
Separate teaching	II	Useful to talk about them	I
Making friends	I	Need for trigger warnings	I
Contraception	I	Need to know	I
Normalizing topics	II	Smaller group discussions	II
Make it positive	III	Need for strict protocols	I
Effects of inappropriate content	II		
treat CYP as adults	I		
External agencies to teach	III		

5. How is RSE at this school?		do you think that you've got enough information from your RSE teaching to make informed choices?	
Code	Frequency	Code	Frequency
Embedded in curriculum	II	yes	III
Good teacher-pupil relationships	IIII	Real-world application	I
Smaller school	I		
Teaching is innovative	IIII		
Encouraged to participate	III		
Diversity of teachers	I		

Theme	Colour Code (frequency)
1. Building rapport and relationships	6 (11)
2. The school system when enacting RSE	10 (18)
3. RSE content	9 (17)
4. Purpose of RSE	9 (17)

7.9 Appendix 9: Themes and subthemes from teacher focus groups

Table 5: Themes from both student focus groups (Primary and Secondary)

Super-ordinate Theme	Sub-Theme	Description	Typical Quote	Frequency
There is a need for a robust school system which supports the enactment of RSE	Pedagogy of teaching reflects student need	Schools have adapted teaching styles to suit the needs in their school	*Having games to make it a bit more competitive, good relationships with teachers with real live experiences, and not making it so regimented and based on PowerPoint slides.*	11
	Teaching is embedded as part of a curriculum	RSE is not taught as a standalone subject or a one-off	*It goes on throughout the curriculum because it is very much important. Also, this school does it differently because I feel like maybe it's because our school is small, and the teachers and students get along very well, and they know each other on a personal level.*	2
	A diversity of teachers makes RSE more relevant	Teachers bring their own life experiences from differing backgrounds	*In a sense of how diverse the teachers are. In the school, obviously, we have like a wide range of teachers in terms of race, sexuality, in terms of gender, etc. and a mix of experiences. So, they're able to sort of give us an insight as to what might not actually be in the curriculum.*	4
Positive relationships between students and teachers make RSE more accessible	Increase in interactions between students and teachers	RSE can help to develop positive interactions with teachers and students	*Teachers and students get along very well, and they know each other on a personal level. So, it means that sometimes teachers, if they feel comfortable, may share personal experiences making it more real. They tell us to always trust your gut feelings and offer advice, instead of it being on slides and it just feels more personal.*	6
	Connection amongst peers	RSE can help to support the development of peer relationships	*I think the best part I've been taught is how your bond between your friends and mates have changed.*	2
	Students feel more connected at school	RSE can encourage a sense of belonging through increasing participation	*They say it in a way to make you feel like you don't need to be embarrassed about it or what's about what happens to you, so you don't need to be scared. You can also feel like trustworthy of them, because I feel you can speak to a teacher, and they can help you.*	2

The content of RSE needs to be delivered positively with a mixture of biological basics and real-life examples	Speak on the positives of RSE and not just the consequences	The curriculum may be skewed to negative outcomes of poor RSE.	*I feel like they should not make it so negative, but you should make it positive. Obviously warn us that at this age, we shouldn't be doing certain things, make it so you wouldn't never want to do it in the future but don't use scare tactics.*	4
	The use of real-life examples supports the enactment of RSE	Lived experiences can support understanding for students	*I think another very good part is the real-life scenarios. So, for example, I never would have thought that I'd get in a scenario where alcohol could be involved in sex or a relationship. But then when I learned more about how I learn that if you're drunk, then things can go horribly wrong.*	5
	The need for relevant topics to be taught	Students want topics which are applicable to them	*The effects on potentially watching some inappropriate content and how it can affect relationships. like the effects of looking at pornography and material that could obviously have an impact*	4
RSE serves a purpose of supporting CYP transition into adulthood by helping them to make informed decisions	Preparing students for adulthood	Students want to feel they are not treated like children.	*Giving that feeling of adulthood to students and the freedom of speech to the students is important.*	2
	Understanding novel situations	Students can make decisions with unfamiliar situations	*RSE prepares you as I know if something happens, say a stranger comes up to me and says, 'do you want come to my house'. I think I know not to go because I don't know them. So now I feel safer.*	7
	RSE can reduce misinformation	Schools can offer information to support learning	*It teaches us that no matter how old you get, people will be curious, and it just eliminates that fact of curiosity because you do know what's going to happen. So, it helps people make an informative decision.*	7

7.10 Appendix 10: Themes and subthemes from student focus groups

Table 6: Themes from both teacher focus groups (Primary and Secondary)

Super-ordinate Theme	Sub-Theme	Description	Typical Quote	Frequency
Seeking student voice and acting upon what they want in an RSE curriculum	Using a variety of ways to deliver RSE.	Adopt teaching strategies which help engage learning.	*So, developing a multimedia approach to RSE. So, it's not just going through reading or going through PowerPoint presentations, and trying to link that to things that might interest the students*	20
	Make RSE part of cross-curricular teaching	Explicitly teach RSE throughout all the curriculum	*In year seven, they cover aspects of sexting within the drama scheme of work. So, there's various other cross curricular ways that it's dealt with as well.*	9
	Create safe spaces to cultivate a positive culture	Make students feel safe to express themselves in RSE by building bonds	*it's more about opening a safe space where everyone feels comfortable and even accepting you in that situation that you're not an expert on that child's life, you're just guiding them forwards and educating them further on them on whatever the matter is.*	7
Adopt a collaborative approach within teachers to inform best practice	Seek specialist expertise from EPs or other agencies	Seek fresh perspective to offer insights	*They've got such a speciality of expertise in terms of knowing relevant and current information about for children's mental health and for what they need to learn in RSE.*	20
	Provide teachers will ongoing training	Make teachers feel confident and safe to deliver RSE	*That's the other thing that's important is that one of the other reasons why teachers don't enjoy teaching it is because they're not confident on the knowledge.*	10
		Regular training and modelling to ensure delivery is done correctly	*the content and the training we'd be exploring would be adapted to suit adults and what we wanted to talk about, but we'd be using the same pedagogies that we'd be using within the lessons, particularly, to model how to encourage a more discursive approach to RSE.*	4

Good communication between school and home is needed for high levels of engagement	Have regular meetings with parents for clarity on RSE topics		*So, the most rewarding moments that I can think of within coaching, and within delivering RSE content is when I have had a really good relationship with the students or the class*	16
	Have a system where all member of staff has some understanding about RSE	Ensure accountability is for all staff.	*I think just having a bit more guidance from SLT or an EP would be very helpful to make sure that we're covering RSE with them and building that into CPD.*	9
A tailored curriculum supports a successful enactment of RSE	Pre-emptive work to plan session	Laying foundations with students before enactment of RSE	*I think all the prep work is what makes sessions go really successfully. I don't think it works when you're just like, 'oh, this session, we're just going to like dip into RSE', it works in terms of always ticking a box but they've not really taken it in or understood it because the space wasn't harboured for them to be able to feel comfortable to ask questions or to indulge in the information because you have to run through it so quickly.*	8
	Links to real-life scenarios	Making RSE more accessible by making it more relevant to CYP	*In the lesson they can talk hypothetically about all these feelings and emotions and conflicts, but then being able to use that and apply that to real situations outside of the classroom. That's when it's felt really rewarding.*	6
	The use of oracy and language techniques	Adopting specific speaking and discussion pedagogies to facilitate conversations	*I would say the main strategies that we use are mostly wellbeing assemblies, and they mostly underpin oracy techniques. so that in the children's interest to explore different themes, kind of different moral themes within relationship*	5

Table 7: Cross-case analysis between primary and secondary schools

Teacher		Student	
Super-ordinate Theme	*Sub-Theme*	*Super-ordinate Theme*	*Sub-Theme*
A tailored curriculum supports a successful enactment of RSE	Pre-emptive work to plan session	**There is a need for a robust school system which supports the enactment of RSE**	Pedagogy of teaching reflects student need
	Links to real-life scenarios		Teaching is embedded as part of a curriculum
	The use of oracy and language techniques		A diversity of teachers makes RSE more relevant
Seeking student voice and acting upon what they want in an RSE curriculum	Using a variety of ways to deliver RSE	**Strong relationships between students and teachers make RSE more accessible**	Increase in interactions between students and teachers.
	Make RSE part of cross-curricular teaching		Connection amongst peers
	Create safe spaces to cultivate a positive culture		Students feel more connected at school
Regularly work alongside teachers to inform best practice	Have regular open forums with parents	**The content of RSE needs to be delivered positively with a mixture of biological basics and real-life examples**	Speak on the positives of RSE and not just the consequences.
	Seek specialist expertise from EPs		The use of real-life examples supports the enactment of RSE
	Provide teachers will ongoing training		The need for relevant topics to be taught
Good communication between school and home is needed for high levels of engagement	Have regular meetings with parents for clarity on RSE topics	**RSE serves a purpose of supporting CYP transition into adulthood by helping them to make informed decisions**	Preparing students for adulthood
	Have good knowledge of the local area demographic.		Understanding novel situations
	Have a system where all member of staff knows about RSE		RSE can reduce misinformation

Colour key
Positive relationships with all stakeholders
A tailored curriculum
Pre-emptive organisation

7.12: Appendix 12 an outline of qualitative assurance using the 'Big Tent Criteria for Qualitative Quality'

Criteria	Application to current research
1. Worthy topic	▪ The topic of RSE is worthy and particularly relevant given the timely legal requirements to develop an RSE curriculum in all schools whilst facing many challenges cited in the literature review.
2. Rich rigor	▪ There is an emphasis on understanding the context by which RSE is being delivered by using the voice of those directly in the school system, namely students and teachers. ▪ The specially selected theoretical frameworks emphasis the use of such voices to develop more intrinsic motivation with learning; a key necessity when it comes to engagement in the classroom. ▪ The application of using a case study has added further rigor to this research as it provides an in depth look at a complex system (notably the school).
3. Sincerity	▪ Reflexivity from the researcher has been considered and acknowledged throughout the research process. ▪ In particular, the researcher positionality has influenced the foundations of the research to look for positives within the enactment of RSE. ▪ There was consideration of the ideas and themes which came immediately after the focus groups took place which then informed the discussion. ▪ Acknowledgement of the challenges which came from conducting online focus groups and the sensitivities which arose when discussing sensitive RSE topics.
4. Credibility	▪ Quotations and opinions from the focus group transcripts were included to add thickness to the points being made in the findings. ▪ Adopting triangulation methods by using resources from the literature, focus groups and other researchers to refine themes and ideas. ▪ The use of multivocality was applied as there are perspectives from the voices of students and teachers form the field research and consideration of parental views in the literature review.
5. Resonance	▪ The feasibility of transferable findings so that other schools can use the findings from the case study to inform their own practices when it comes to enacting RSE. ▪ The presentation of outlining the case study school so that others can imagine and conceptualise the application of pedagogies in their own school system. ▪ The description of findings paired with quotations and linked to pedagogies and theory emphasis natural generalization meaning that readers can make judgements about the extent to which findings should inform action in other cases.
6. Significant contribution	▪ The use theoretical framing has been threaded through the research to emphasise how they can contribute to the successful enactment of RSE in schools. ▪ There is an emphasis on the practicality of using the findings in this research to inform others of generating successes with RSE. Namely relating to the use of oracy in schools and how this can be achieved.
7. Ethics	▪ Ethics were adhered to following the approval of ethical clearance. ▪ There was extensive commitment to ensure that topics of sensitivity were considered given the nature of some topics which occur in RSE.
8. Meaningful coherence	▪ Threads of literature, methodology, findings and application to stakeholders has been used throughout. ▪ Interpretation of findings were explicitly linked to the literature review questions. ▪ The study has achieved it purpose of finding successes in RSE and championing the use of student and teacher voice which can inform examples of good practice for RSE.