

Schools work really hard to successfully create an inclusive environment and there is much good practice focussing on improving students' knowledge around protected characteristics as defined in The Equality Act 2010. Schools (and wider society) have made huge strides forwards to lessen, and try to eradicate, discrimination based on race, religion or disability with positive effect. Two other protected characteristics relate to sexual orientation and gender reassignment and often these have proved more challenging for schools to address.

Traditionally there has been a world view that promotes heterosexuality as the normal or preferred sexual orientation. This is called heteronormativity and schools are no exception in that RSE teaching has historically tended to focus on teaching about relationships in the context of a male and a female falling in love, getting married and having babies (indeed the SRE guidance 2000 talks of the importance of marriage to family life and the National Curriculum Science requirements lead schools to focus on conception). This teaching is not wrong, and for many young people will furnish them with facts and moral arguments to support the life choices they make. However, for some children this will not apply to their life and will not teach all children about the full spectrum of gender, sexuality and relationships. Consider these scenarios: How does the child with two dads feel in a "traditional" RSE lesson which focusses on romantic relationships occurring only between male and female?; If you teach single-sex RSE lessons, which group does the intersex or transgender child belong in?

We have a legal duty, but also a moral one, to support all children and their families in providing relevant, varied and unbiased RSE in order to create an inclusive environment where we prevent Homophobic, Biphobic and Transphobic bullying and respond appropriately if, and when, incidents occur. We can only do this if we educate our staff, our students, their parents and the wider school community.