

RSE Working in Walthamstow:

Walthamstow's Response to the Government's Consultation on Relationship and Sex Education

The issue of RSE has been a campaign priority in the constituency of Walthamstow as we see it as integral to creating an open, diverse and safe community where young people are supported to thrive. The Walthamstow RSE Group was set up in 2014 and consists of over 20 professionals, including child psychologists, FGM specialists, teachers, parents, local councillors, healthcare professionals, community activists, third sector organisations such as Stonewall, the NSPCC, True Tube, Diversity Role Models and ELOP. We have also consulted Professor Vanita Sundaram from York University who is an expert in RSE and violence against women and girls. Walthamstow is already somewhat ahead of the game in RSE as Frederick Bremer School has developed best practice, accredited LGBT+ inclusive RSE and will soon be providing guidance and training to other schools in the borough.

Alongside working in co-operation with all of the partners above, we have organised and facilitated many events to engage and seek leadership from Walthamstow's young people. 'Waltham Forest Young Advisors' have been particularly active in determining the content and direction of the events we have organised. This consultation response is founded on the diversity of young people's voices who were actively engaged at our events. We also launched a 'Walthamstow Education Survey' which specifically addressed the issue of RSE by asking parents, pupils and education practitioners to describe the current provision of RSE in their local schools.

Here is a timeline of the events and surveys we have conducted relating to RSE in Walthamstow:

09/01/2015: 'SRE Activist Meeting'

40 young people in attendance from Walthamstow schools and women activists from the community.

24/01/2017: 'Our Bodies, Our Futures' Conference (See conference agenda at the end of this doc)

All day conference, over 200 participants, the majority of whom were young people with significant representation from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds. We delivered over 20 different workshops with 50 speakers spanning various sectors and experts in the fields of FGM, tackling sexual violence in gangs, rape cultures, forced marriage, youth engagement, cyber abuse, street harassment, parenting, sexual health, youth empowerment and tackling homophobic bullying and supporting LGBT+ pupils. There were also sessions to explore age-appropriate RSE and RSE for young people with learning difficulties. The conference was designed and developed by

young people from the local community with the support of professionals. The objective of the conference was to support young people increase insight into their relationships and sexual health through improving the provision of RSE in Walthamstow. Young participants created a pledge highlighting what they felt was important in RSE and this has been included in this submission.

09/03/2015: 'Our Bodies, Our Futures RSE Workshop' as part of International Women's Day. Discussion revolved around what the focus of RSE classes should be in Walthamstow schools.

02/04/2015: 'Our Bodies, Our Futures RSE Workshop' - a repeat of the above workshop at an alternative secondary school. Over 40 pupils in attendance.

August – October 2017: Walthamstow Education Survey:

146 responses from pupils, parents, school administrative staff, teachers, governors and senior leadership teams from 24 different primary and secondary schools in Waltham Forest. A main focus of the survey was RSE and we asked participants to describe current RSE provision in their school. We also collected data on mental health provision in schools and school responses to sexual assaults in schools.

02/02/2018: 'Our Streets, Our Schools, Our Safety' Youth Conference:

Over 60 participants from local schools (once again with significant representation – over 50% - from Black and Minority Ethnic backgrounds), education practitioners, the police, local councillors, trade unions, domestic violence specialists, Spark2Life (exiting gang specialists) and local businesses. The day focused on personal safety at home, school and on the streets. Exploring RSE best practice was acknowledged as being pivotal to keeping young people safe, in both the private and public spheres.

Walthamstow RSE Group's submission is based on the findings from all of the above consultations:

1. Thinking about relationships education in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.

"Relationship and sex education should be provided urgently across the school from Reception urgently. It is a safe-guarding issue. It should be rolled out according to the consultation at least and I would go further, introducing information and language at a younger age and dealing with the influence of the internet from Year 4 or 5."

Teacher, Walthamstow Primary School.

Youth empowerment / Celebration of sexuality including the multiplicities of different sexual orientations and gender identities / Gender Equality

Having consulted with 100s of young people across the constituency from a diversity of backgrounds, it is clear they have a healthy inquisitive thirst to know everything

about relationships, from kissing and masturbation to recognising patterns of controlling behaviours. Young people in Walthamstow have emphasised the importance of negotiation skills, knowing one's boundaries, agency and empowerment. All of which can be taught through high-quality RSE.

We have found that Walthamstow young people of all ages recognise their rights, not just to accurate information about prevention of abuse, but also to a positive understanding of sexuality. Alongside safety and boundaries, RSE should also develop their understanding of their rights, of sexual orientation, gender identity and gender norms. A review of curriculum-based sexuality education programmes found that 80% of those which addressed gender or power relations were associated with a significant decrease in pregnancy, childbearing or STIs. These programmes were five times as effective as those which did not address gender or power (Haberland, 2015).

Young people and professionals reported that the concept of pleasure is largely absent within the previous SRE guidelines. Professor Sundaram notes that any silencing serves to produce highly gendered and heteronormative understandings of sexual agency, autonomy and empowerment. Walthamstow young people recognised that sex must not only be positioned as a 'risky' and dangerous activity, which is clearly linked to child protection; sex is not discussed as pleasurable and RSE should proactively address this.

2. Thinking about relationships and sex education in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught for different age groups/key stages and why. Please include any considerations or evidence which informed your choices.

As opposed to focusing on just three areas, professionals in Walthamstow, including education practitioners, welcome an RSE curriculum that is wide-ranging and based on a 'building-block' approach, so that topics in primary schools can be developed for older pupils.

A good example of this is role that RSE can play in addressing violence and abuse within the home. In recent years, Walthamstow has benefited as a community from having an active anti-FGM campaigner, Hibo Wardere, who has led sessions within the local area on female genital mutilation. This has happened alongside the work of Educate2Eradicate to tackle honour based violence and forced marriage. Both presented at the 'Our Bodies, Our Futures' Conference and both have worked within local schools to deliver lessons to help local students of different ages to engage with these issues.

In our session, 'Education for all: Tackling homophobic bullying and supporting LGBT+ pupils' at our conference, 'Our Bodies, Our Futures,' a young person said, "We find gaps between ourselves and others and choose to construct walls between each

other.” What became clear from this session was that schools have to play a part in bridging those gaps. Pupils and professionals agreed that there was a lack of guidance, support and consideration for LGBT+ issues.

We therefore embrace Stonewall’s observations that the current guidance for teaching RSE which was last updated in 2000 (prior to the repeal of Section 28), contains no mention of LGBT+ people or relationships. As a result, while a growing number of schools are meeting the needs of LGBT+ pupils in this teaching, with the likes of Walthamstow’s Fredrick Bremer School being accredited as a Stonewall Bronze Champion, research demonstrates that these schools continue to be in a minority. This is despite all schools’ legal duties to eliminate discrimination and promote equality of opportunity for LGBT+ young people and young people with LGBT+ family members.

Members of Walthamstow RSE Group such as Stonewall, Diversity Role Models and ELOP advocate that teaching about different families, including those with LGBT+ family members, is vital to ensuring that young people from all families, including those with LGBT+ family members, feel included and welcomed. An inclusive approach helps all young people understand that LGBT+ people are part of everyday life and helping them to develop inclusive and accepting attitudes towards LGBT+ people. This is vital in stemming the development of anti-LGBT+ prejudice which can manifest as bullying further down the line.

3. We are particularly interested in understanding stakeholder views on Relationships Education and RSE which are specific to the digital context. Are there important aspects of ensuring safe online relationships that would not otherwise be covered in wider Relationships Education and Relationships and Sex Education, or as part of the computing curriculum?

“Cyber Bullying ... should just be called abuse.”
Walthamstow pupil.

“Attitude of boys will be boys - there was incidents with boys hacking into girls social media accounts and sending sexual messages. School responded inadequately.”

Walthamstow Parent.

The 2017 Digital Romance Report (CEOP and Brook) demonstrates that many young people are forming relationships online and makes clear that education on digital safety cannot be limited to the mechanics of internet privacy but as part of wider understanding of safe relationships in general. As the report shows, having the confidence, knowledge and skills to negotiate relationships safely *offline* can cross over with the ability to do this *online*.

In our session, 'Empowering young people to have safe relationships through SRE' at our conference, 'Our Bodies, Our Futures,' the 'This Is Abuse' website was cited as a resource which had lots of useful information and materials including short videos and social media resources.

Safety has also been an issue in the constituency in terms of sexual assault policies in schools and challenging entrenched gender social norms which fuel sexism and misogyny. We have found that an increasing number of the young women we engaged at events felt unsafe and needed more support in knowing where to go for help. This includes staying safe in terms of knowing where to go for support with sexual health. Young people relayed that they wanted information regarding signposting to local services and where they can go online for information.

4. We are also interested in understanding more about how schools communicate with parents on Relationships Education and RSE and are able to make informed decisions that best meet the needs of their children. This includes a right to withdraw their child from sex education within the RSE subject but not from sex education in the national curriculum for science. How should schools effectively consult parents so they can make informed decisions that meet the needs of their child, including on the right to withdraw? For example, how often, on what issues and by what means?

“Apprehension about discussing it with parents, for fear of being judged.”

Walthamstow pupil.

“Parents need to have a proper understanding of the SRE curriculum.”

Walthamstow pupil.

“Seems v good particularly that opt out is v difficult.”

Walthamstow Parent.

“It seems comprehensive. Parents are given the opportunity to view the material in advance.”

Walthamstow Parent.

“SRE classes for parents!”

Walthamstow pupil.

Parent engagement was a constant theme across all of the events we organised and many voices have argued for a need to involve parents in RSE conversations. Many young people we have engaged with have said that their parents need RSE classes. However, upon consulting with teaching professionals and academics, they have expressed concern regarding ‘trying to teach’ parents. One school outlined that their responsibility is to teach pupils and that many parents were reluctant to embracing new learning opportunities. For example, as part of Fredrick Bremer’s work with Diversity Role Models, they have launched a parental engagement session on LGBT+ issues with parents. Their feedback from such work was as follows: 1) Schools engage already liberal and accepting parents. 2) Schools get negative opposition from

parents and this in turn compromises the safety of LGBT+ students as their parents/carers then start to withdraw them from certain aspects of education, including their own LGBT+ identity, which is seen as a threat to some parents. Diversity specialists instead argue that schools focus should be on creating a safe space for LGBT+ pupils and engaging parents can sometimes be counter-productive.

At our Walthamstow events, some pupils displayed anxiety regarding involving parents and spoke of the difficulty in being able to be open with their parents concerning relationships and sex. Issues regarding cultural sensitivities and how some pupils will not be able to engage with RSE material as much as others will need to be considered thoroughly. Professionally trained RSE educators who understand cultural sensitives and are representatively diverse in terms of race and ethnicity, will be best placed to deliver RSE in an engaging way.

We endorse and practice dialogue that communicates the importance of RSE to parents, emphasising that RSE is about all relationships and not just romantic ones. Furthermore it is important to communicate results from research that shows that young people do not start having more sex or start having sex earlier as a result of high-quality RSE provision early on in school (Professor Sundaram). On the contrary, RSE aims to develop young people's knowledge and skills to make informed choices regarding their behaviour, and in so doing, limit their risk and vulnerability to sexual ill-health through factors such as unwanted pregnancy, unwanted, abusive and exploitative sexual activity, unsafe abortion and STIs, including HIV.

Importantly, research conducted by the Sex Education Forum has shown that the majority of parents support RSE, even at primary and secondary school levels. The results from our Walthamstow Education Survey reiterated the importance of parents not being able to prevent children from receiving information which is intended to safeguard them from abuse. This includes information about their own bodies, about consent and relationships. Since child abuse is frequently something which occurs within families it is important that young people's right to receive information about sex and relationships, and where to seek confidential information and support, is not threatened by parental withdrawal.

In Walthamstow, we have been actively involving local government, schools, the police and other stakeholders to advocate for the importance of RSE with parents, carers and other community members to ensure that no child is denied their right to high quality education.

The feedback from our conference 'Our Bodies, Our Futures' proved exactly why such events are needed in communities. This conference provided people from a diversity of backgrounds with a forum to talk, celebrate difference, debate and share concerns and aspirations. It also gave lawmakers the opportunity to hear the voices of young

people and for them to be included in the debate and empowered with the direction over their shared futures.

5. Thinking about PSHE in primary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please include your reasons for choosing each subject area or evidence to support your suggestions.

“At present schools are required to teach children the biology of sex, but little or nothing on issues like consent or respect for each other which are a vital part of a healthy relationship. With issues like FGM, sexual harassment, pornography, domestic violence, cyber-bullying and gang culture affecting the lives of many young people, I’m not surprised that they are asking for help in this way. It is time we stopped leaving these issues to the playground or the internet, and ensured we give every young person in Walthamstow the respect and knowledge they want and deserve.”

Stella Creasy, MP for Walthamstow

The PSHE Association provides a great deal of evidence and information in support of good quality PSHE and shows that the vast majority of young people and parents support its provision. We would reiterate our response to Question 2 whereby we argued against focusing on just three areas. Walthamstow young people have communicated a significantly higher number to prioritise. They have highlighted that RSE needs to include content challenging the limitations of constructed gender norms, advocate bodily autonomy, agency, consent, respect, sexual orientation, gender identity, including celebrating LGBT+ issues, what constitutes harassment and violence, where to go for support, mental health and sexual pleasure. Walthamstow professionals and young people recognise that being able to engage critically with all of the above will empower them to be sexual subjects, instead of objects, and reject harassment and teach boys and young men (mainly) not to perpetrate abuse and violence (Professor Sundaram).

The teaching of health, sexuality and relationships topics as part of PSHE should be linked to practical support and access to services for young people, as well as other topic areas such as mental health, in line with a ‘whole school approach.’ Walthamstow young people argued that they should always be provided with information about where they can seek confidential support on issues relating to their health and wellbeing. It is paramount that this teaching considers the diverse and different experiences and needs of young people, including special educational needs and disabilities.

The importance of RSE not being left to the playground was repeated at all of our events. Young people called for improved teacher training in the area of RSE and welcomed the option of having independent and highly specialised educators

delivering RSE. Specialist teacher training was continually highlighted as key to the successful implementation of RSE.

6. Thinking about PSHE in secondary schools, what do you believe are the three most important subject areas that should be taught and why? Please also include your reasons for choosing each subject area or evidence to support your suggestions.

As above, comprehensive PSHE should be provided to all pupils and should include high-quality education on relationships and sexuality. As with RSE, a 'spiral' or 'building block' approach should be taken, where learning is developed and reinforced throughout primary and secondary levels. The PSHE Association advises that PSHE be delivered in the same way as other subjects, so that it is regularly timetabled and provided by trained teachers. Ensuring sufficient time is given to the training of educators and provision of lessons was highlighted as being crucial by both Walthamstow teachers and pupils. Walthamstow young people expressed repeated interests in being actively involved in the lessons and feeling safe to ask questions and participate.

Fredrick Bremer School is pioneering a new LGBT+ inclusive curriculum to promote equality and to tackle homophobic, biphobic and transphobic bullying. This journey started with a small student equality group that has grown into a dynamic LGBT student group who are part of the Educate & Celebrate Pride Youth Network. They are also proud of their gender inclusive toilets and gender inclusive school uniform. Staff training and development has been key to the successful implementation of such LGBT+ inclusive initiatives.

In the last year, Fredrick Bremer School have developed two aspects of their curriculum; in PSHE Year 8 students study a ten week unit of work on sexual orientation and gender identity. This covers issues such as different sexual orientations and gender identities, LGBT+ rights around the world, the impact of homophobia and how to be trans inclusive. They have also written and launched, alongside Stonewall, a new LGBT+ inclusive RSE curriculum. Michele Phillips, member of Fredrick Bremer's SLT, spearheaded this work and created the Waltham Forest RSE Forum to train other teachers to teach LGBT+ inclusive RSE.

7. How much flexibility do you think schools should have to meet the needs of individual pupils and to reflect the diversity of local communities and wider society in the content of PSHE lessons in schools?

In Walthamstow we recognise that children and young people have a right to evidence-based education which contains accurate information. This right does not change depending on the type of school a young person goes to. All resources used, and any external facilitators must be properly vetted to ensure that information is current and

accurate. There are groups in the UK currently visiting schools which have given young people misleading and scientifically inaccurate information about topics such as abortion. Education should be inclusive and non-stigmatising; content delivered on the contrary may be in breach of the Equality Act.

We would like to reiterate the importance of school counselling services in relation to high-quality RSE. RSE should cover difficult topics in a safe and sensitive way that may trigger child victim-survivors of abuse and/or sexual and domestic violence. A holistic support package, which includes a multi-agency response, whereby school counsellors would be available to support pupils who may feel safe and empowered to disclose. This includes the need for schools to have comprehensive sexual assault policies so that pupils are encouraged to report peer-on-peer abuse. This policy needs to cover the ways in which perpetrators will be held accountable for their actions, prioritising the victim-survivor's safety at all times, and supporting perpetrators with anger management and control issues, be their violence structural and/or physical. RSE provides a unique opportunity to engage young people (mainly young men) in early intervention work to break generational cycles of violence. The funding required for such support is miniscule when compared to the overall cost of adult violence and domestic violence on wider society. Funding is needed to implement proactive mental health support services in schools and to provide teacher training on RSE, ensuring that it is allocated curriculum time, as opposed to ad hoc down-time.

Organisation Name

Walthamstow RSE Group

Please provide a link to the webpage of your organisation

<http://www.workingforwalthamstow.org.uk/rse>

Please provide a summary of how your organisation is currently involved with Sex and Relationships Education and/or Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education

Stella Creasy is the Labour and Co-operative MP for Walthamstow. She has organised the Walthamstow RSE Group and facilitated the events and surveys that form the basis of this response. RSE is one of her campaign priorities and an issue that she is deeply passionate about. Stella has contributed to RSE round tables, parliamentary debates, tabled amendments to existing legislation and asked questions in Parliament. She would like the constituency of Walthamstow to be an area of best practice in RSE and is proud to have worked on RSE legislation, in partnership with a host of national and local partners. She is deeply grateful for all of the support and active participation from the significant numbers of Walthamstow constituents who have contributed to this response.

Time	Hall	Classroom MH1	Classroom GM3	Classroom MH3	Classroom GM5
10.30 am	Tea and Coffee and Registration				
10.45am	Welcome from Stella Creasy MP and Jenny Smith, Headteacher of Frederick Bremer School – Main Hall				
10.50 am	Relationship and Sex Education: Why Do We Need To Do It for Walthamstow? - Main Hall Jenny Smith, Headteacher Frederick Bremer School, Laura Bates, Everyday Sexism Project Founder Simon Blake, Brook, Hibo Wardere, WF Anti FGM Project and local Parent Scarlet Harris, Our Community Our Schools Parent Group, Arifa Aleem, Chair and local young Campaigner				
11.45am	Tea and Coffee				
12.00-12.45pm	Man Up: Including Everyone in The Fight For Equality HALL Andreas Anmar, Frederick Bremer Dads Group Colin James, Gangs United Mark Rusling, Education Lead Waltham Forest Council Eshaan Akbar, Comedian	Rape Culture: South London Rape Crisis Centre MH1 Jayne Bullough Cllr. Karen Bellamy, Domestic Violence Lead, Waltham Forest Council	Tackling FGM and Forced Marriage: Walthamstow's Project GM3 Hibo Wadere, E17 anti FGM project and Arifa Nasim, Karma Nirvana	Youth Engagement Workshop London Borough of Waltham Forest's Youth Independent Advisory Group (YIAG) & Young Advisors MH3	Online, Out of Sight? Talking Cyber Abuse Vanessa McHardy and All Rise GM5
12.45pm	Lunch				
13.15pm	Performance from #Doingitforthegirls				
13.25pm	Safe Everywhere: Providing Third Party Reporting of Harassment and Violence For Walthamstow Jackie Sebire, Acting Borough Commander Waltham Forest Police Julia Gray and Bryony Beynon, Hollaback Aysha Esakji, Hammersmith and Fulham 3rd Party Reporting Project	Education for All: Providing Age Appropriate SRE in Primary Schools Mixed Session MH1 CWP Resources, Debbie Young SRE consultant, Kate Jennings Headteacher Mission Grove	Education for All: Supporting SRE for children with Special Needs and Learning Disabilities GM3 Doireann Larkin and Sandra Vacciana, Tender Andreas Anmar, Frederick Bremer Dads Group	Carefree Kids? Becoming a Parent Ros Kane, carefree kids MH3	Provision of Sexual Healthcare Services in Waltham Forest GM5 Samantha Norwood and Jacqui King, Oliver Road Young People's Sexual Health coordinators NELFT, Kirsty Baxter, Terence Higgins Trust
14.10pm	Tea and Coffee				
14.20pm	Youth Empowerment and Self Confidence workshop HALL Tanya Anastasiadis, OBRUK Teresa Reynolds Incredible Brilliant Youth	Education for All: Providing Age Appropriate RSE in Primary Schools - Women Only discussion MH1 CWP Resources, Debbie Young SRE consultant, Kate Jennings Headteacher Mission Grove	Education for All: Tackling homophobic bullying and Supporting LGBT+ pupils GM3 Sarah, Chair of ELOP and local parent, Chris Sims Head of Education at Stonewall, Cllr Simon Miller Waltham Forest Council	Breaking the Silence: Tackling Sexual Violence within Gangs MH3 Laura Butterworth and Lisa Witherden, Safer London Foundation Colin James, Gangs United Richard Graham, Waltham Forest Police and Roz Gordon, Head of Community Development, CBHA	Empowering young people to have safe relationships through SRE GM5 Sarah Morgan and Silvana Gambini, Waltham Forest Rising
15.05pm	Panel Discussion: How Can We Campaign for Change? Main Hall Nimko Ali, Daughters of Eve Yas Neclati, NMP3 and one of the Guardian's "Rising Stars" 2015, Joe Hayman PSHE Association			Safe Space Discussion Room MH3	Saying Yes: How to Talk about Consent with Children GM5 Dr Fiona Vera Gray, End Violence Against Women Coalition tbc
15.45pm	Our Bodies, Our Future Pledge , Photo Call and Closing Remarks Main Hall Stella Creasy MP				