

Sex education: schools' religious ethos may 'limit' pupils' knowledge of LGBT facts and contraception

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More than 50 faith leaders have warned that schools' ability to teach relationships and sex education (RSE) through a faith ethos could undermine its accuracy and inclusivity.

In a letter in the *Guardian*, figures from churches and synagogues across the UK [argued](#) that schools must "actively promote" the acceptance of LGBT people and factual information about birth control within sex education.

Several educational experts – such as Rabbi Dr Jonathan Romain, who chairs the [Accord Coalition](#) for Inclusive Education – were among the signatories. Others included [Yasmin Alibhai-Brown](#), the chair of British Muslims for Secular Democracy.

They congratulated the government for ensuring that relationships and sex education will soon be taught in all schools in England. The Children and Social Work Act, which requires all secondary schools in England to teach RSE, became law in April. The Act also requires the education secretary to publish regulations and statutory guidance on RSE provision.

But the letter added that the requirement was "open-ended and undefined". RSE could therefore be "hijacked by those who wish to overlook topics such as accessing confidential sexual and reproductive healthcare services and contraception, as well as those who wish to limit pupils to what they consider to be religiously acceptable notions of gender and sexual orientation".

The National Secular Society is part of the Sex Education Forum and has long [advocated](#) religiously neutral age appropriate education about sex and relationships.

Stephen Evans, NSS campaigns director, said: "This is an important reminder that sex education should be based solely on a rational assessment of the interests of pupils and wider society. We have seen the harm, particularly for LGBT pupils, where a religious agenda is imposed on RSE.

"It's good to see civil society leaders – religious or otherwise – standing up for children's rights, and against those who seek to impose their theology in the classroom."

The letter urged the government to ensure its guidance requires schools "to actively promote the acceptance of LGBT people and provide, for pupils of sufficient maturity, factual information about contraception and abortion". It said the "paramount" concerns should be to ensure RSE is inclusive and pupils are well-informed.

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