



The Rt Hon Damian Hinds MP
Secretary of State for Education
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
London, SW1P 3BT

14 February 2019

Dear Secretary of State,

Relationships and Sex Education

I am writing to encourage you to keep in mind vital importance of balanced and accurate Relationships and Sex Education to all children as the department considers the publication of Statutory Guidance and Regulations for schools.

The NSS previously wrote to the Government on this matter following the publication of our [Unsafe Sex Education](#) report, which highlighted the risks of allowing religious schools to teach RSE within the tenets of their faith.

Whilst we are pleased to see RSE put on a statutory footing, we are disappointed that the decision was taken to retain the parental opt-out as we fear this will lead to RSE being denied to some of the children and young people who stand to most benefit from it.

We are further concerned by reports that the Government may dilute the advice it publishes on the Independent School Standards to no longer stipulate that all independent schools must teach respect for LGBT people.

We are aware of the extensive lobbying being undertaken by a host of religious organisations to obtain a legal right for parents to withdraw their children from RSE. Our research suggests that a significant amount of this opposition is being driven by [‘Stop RSE’](#); a campaign which has been spreading misinformation and homophobic messages through a series of public meetings.

The campaign is [encouraging](#) parents to withdraw their children and pressurise schools to change their curricula to fit in with intolerant views on sexuality. Resources available on its website until earlier this week¹ included a book which endorses lashing and asserts that the punishment for homosexuality is death. Dr Kate Godfrey-Faussett, an academic who is playing a prominent role in the Stop RSE campaign is the instigator of the petition to be debated in Parliament on 25 February. She has stated publicly at meetings that Muslims should “work psychologically or in a mental health capacity” with those experiencing same-sex attraction.

Parents’ rights and religious freedoms are not absolute and must be balanced against the need to eliminate discrimination, advance equality of opportunity, and foster good relations for LGBT people. Challenging LGBT discrimination in school lessons and in everyday school life is key to promoting equality at school and in wider society.

¹ Evidence available upon request

The NSS believes all pupils should have the right to access education that gives them clear and accurate information on topics that matter to their health and wellbeing. This includes learning that LGBT people and same-sex relationships exist. Religious objections, should not be allowed to override attempts to ensure that happens.

We therefore urge you to ensure that forthcoming guidance is not watered down and that all pupils at all schools, regardless of their religious ethos, enjoy the same entitlement to broad and balanced LGBT inclusive RSE.

Futhermore, we urge you to ensure schools are robustly supported by the Department and Ofsted to resist external pressure from groups seeking to influence school policy so as to conform to narrow faith- based ideology.

We would be very happy to meet you to discuss this matter in further detail.

I look forward to hearing from you

Yours sincerely,

Stephen Evans

**Chief Executive Officer
National Secular Society**