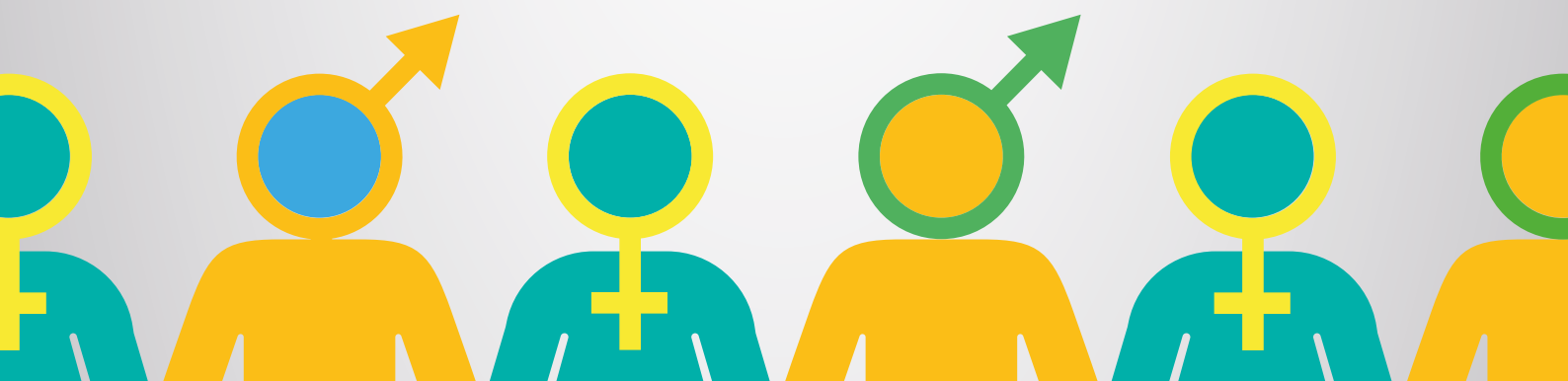




UNSAFE SEX EDUCATION:

The risk of letting religious
schools teach within the
tenets of their faith

April 2018



Contents

1. Introduction	2
2. Summary of key findings	3
3. Basic statistics	5
4. Primary goal of SRE at many faith schools: To impart religious values about sex and relationships	7
5. Anti-secularism	10
6. Policies on teaching about marriage	12
7. Policies on contraception	14
8. Anti-Abortion	16
9. Anti-homosexuality	17
10. Promotion of celibacy	19
11. Working with external parties	20
12. Other policies	21
13. Conclusion	22

1. Introduction

In December 2017, the government launched a consultation on changes to the teaching of Sex and Relationship Education (SRE) and PSHE. The consultation closed in February 2018, and the government is in the process of analysing the feedback.

The consultation follows recent amendments to the Children and Social Work Bill requiring all secondary schools in England to teach sex and relationships education (SRE). In its [call for evidence for the consultation](#), the government stated “it is important that we ensure universal coverage for all pupils and improved quality”.

However, [in its guidance for SRE](#), the government asserts that “The religious convictions of pupils and their parents should be respected” and that “Sensitive issues should be covered by the school’s policy and in consultation with parents. Schools of a particular religious ethos may choose to reflect that in their sex and relationship education policy.”

Furthermore, the government’s [policy statement](#) on the changes to SRE reads, “This provision enables faith schools to teach these subjects according to the tenets of their faith, whilst still being consistent with requirements of the Equality Act.”

To what extent faith schools may teach SRE within “the tenets of their faith” is not specified, and therefore the clear potential for inconsistency between schools has arisen. There is likely to be inconsistency between different types of schools – nullifying universal coverage – and a likelihood that SRE will be taught in some faith schools in a manner that outright contradicts the teaching in non-faith schools as well as advice from experts in SRE.

The National Secular Society is particularly concerned that despite government assurances, faith schools that are teaching SRE according to the tenets of their faith are not being consistent with the requirements of the Equality Act. We are also concerned that the recent consultation has attracted significant attention among religious lobby groups who are keen to ensure that their agenda can continue to be promoted unchallenged in SRE, and that they can “opt out” of teaching any aspect of SRE that conflicts with their ideology.

Concerned by the wording of an SRE policy discovered in one state Catholic school after being alerted to it by a parent, we examined the policies of all other state secondary Catholic schools in England to ascertain the extent to which they are teaching SRE from the Catholic perspective, and to identify any problematic issues that may arise as a result. We then extended this research to include state Church of England schools, Christian schools of no particular denomination, Jewish schools, and Muslim schools.

This study examined the SRE policies of secondary, middle-deemed secondary and all-through schools in England with a religious character or ethos as listed above, as displayed on the schools’ websites. We have discovered that the majority of faith schools are indeed explicitly delivering SRE within the tenets of their faith, rather than in an impartial and secular framework that would generally be found at non-faith schools. Although SRE policies vary greatly from school to school, in many cases they amount to the promotion of a particular religious ideology within attitudes to sex and relationships.

In addition to illustrating the extent to which SRE becomes an exercise in religious evangelism at many schools, this report also highlights those aspects of SRE policies that are of particular concern because they contradict SRE advice given by educational professionals, or because they breach the requirements of the Equality Act.

The [Sex and relationships education \(SRE\) for the 21st century](#) advice document produced by Brook, the PSHE Association and the Sex Education Forum states that high quality SRE “is inclusive of difference: gender identity, sexual orientation, disability, ethnicity, culture, age, faith or belief, or other life experience.”

However, many faith schools were found to have policies and practices that are either implicitly or explicitly disparaging of individuals according to the following characteristics:

- **Marriage and civil partnership:** Teaching that marriage is an ideal state; that sex outside of marriage is wrong; that no other partnership be equated with Christian marriage; that divorce is unrecognised;
- **Pregnancy and maternity:** Teaching that being married with children is an ideal; that marriages in which children are not possible are not as valid; that contraception and abortion are wrong;
- **Religion or belief:** Teaching that Christian marriage is the ideal partnership; that wider “secular” society is sinful, as are its teachings on sex;
- **Sexual orientation:** Teaching that homosexual acts are wrong; that homosexuality itself is “disordered”;
- **Gender identity:** Teaching that aspects of menstruation and some methods of managing periods are taboo. Additionally, policies regarding contraception and abortion could be interpreted as particularly disadvantaging female pupils.

To compare what is being taught in SRE at faith schools with what is considered best practice by experts, this report occasionally refers to the research published in BMJ Open in 2017 by Pound P, Denford S, Shucksmith J *et al*, ‘[What is best practice in sex and relationship education? A synthesis of evidence, including stakeholders’ views](#)’. This study by academics in the field of health and social care draws

from research in UK schools to establish key features of effective and acceptable SRE, and formulate best practice criteria.

While the National Secular Society believes that religious institutions have the right to teach any stance on sex and relationships, that right should not extend to what is taught at state schools. The education and welfare of pupils should be the first and foremost priority of schools, rather than the facilitation of religious indoctrination. SRE should therefore be taught according to the advice of healthcare and education professionals, rather than the beliefs of religious groups. This is of particular importance when dealing with subjects that directly address the physical and mental welfare of young people, which is certainly the case of SRE. It is also important in ensuring that schools, as public bodies, are genuinely compliant with their equality duties.

The National Secular Society also acknowledges that there is a considerable difference between the objective and impartial teaching about different religious and non-religious views of SRE, and the promotion of those views. It is clear from our research that faith schools are not teaching about religious attitudes to sex and relationships from a neutral standpoint, but from a subjective stance as a school with a specific ideology to uphold.

This research is largely qualitative in nature. It is exceedingly difficult to attach a precise figure to the extent to which faith schools are promoting religious ideology. Therefore, this report focuses on key examples and quotations from individual schools to illustrate what we know is being taught at some schools.

2. Summary of key findings

In a study of over 600 state secondary faith schools in England, 77% of those with an SRE policy were found to deliver the subject according to the teachings of the school's religious ethos, rather than in a secular, impartial manner. SRE policies could not be found on the websites for nearly half of the schools. In many faith schools, SRE is delivered primarily through the Religious Education (RE) curriculum or equivalent.

Findings on specific teachings regarding SRE are listed below. More details and quotations are given in the body of this document.

1. Faith schools teach religious marriage is the ideal setting for sex; Catholic schools teach sex outside of Christian marriage is wrong; Catholic schools teach that divorce is not recognised

“The Catholic Church teaches that sex is a gift from God to enable two people to express their exclusive love for each other and to help continue God’s work of creation. Thus sexual intercourse should only take place within the firm commitment of marriage.”

(All Saints Catholic School and Technology College)

“The School will, in all its relationships and sex education, aim to ensure that young people are encouraged and enabled to consider positively the family as fundamental social unit and the ideal of sexual expression taking place within Christian marriage.”

(Bennett Memorial Diocesan School)

“The Catholic Church does not accept that anyone has the right to decree a divorce.”

(Holy Trinity School)

At Catholic schools and some other Christian schools, sexuality is widely taught as a divine privilege restricted to men and women in a Christian marriage. Some Catholic schools teach that divorce is not recognised. Al-Hijrah School, the only Muslim school where a policy could be found on its website, also teaches “Sexual morality and sex outside marriage, prohibition of co-habitation, extra-marital, and pre-marital sex together with the Islamic view of it.”

2. Catholic schools promote marriage with children as an ideal and prohibit contraceptives

“Artificial Contraception – Divorces sex act from its prime ‘raison d’être’, childbirth. Can result in a debasing of ‘sex’ to the mundane which can degrade sexual relationships and lead to promiscuity.”

(The Trinity Catholic School A Voluntary Academy)

The promotion of being married with children as the ideal is widespread in Catholic schools. Family life including children is taught as a sacred vocation. Artificial contraception is therefore condemned as immoral. Al-Hijrah School’s policy also suggest that it may teach some forms of artificial contraception are prohibited.

3. Catholic schools teach abortion is wrong

“Our teaching about sex, relationships and health will adhere to the following fundamental principles: i. Every human being is created in the image of God ii. Every human life is sacred and “[...] must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception.”

(St John Fisher Catholic High School)

Catholic schools generally make it explicit that they believe abortion is morally wrong. Al-Hijrah School is not explicit, but states it teaches the Islamic view of abortion, which is usually prohibition in most circumstances.

4. Catholic schools explicitly teach homosexual activity is wrong. Many other faith schools imply that it is wrong and cast homosexuality in a negative light.

“The Catholic Church’s understanding the fact that homosexual orientation is distinguished from the evaluation of the sexual activity of homosexual people. The latter is deemed unacceptable as it does not respect the complimentary nature of male and female since it lacks the life giving potential to proper sexual love.”

(Holy Trinity School)

“The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial.”

(Saint John Bosco College)

“At the same time it must be also recognised that for many people, including some religious faiths, homosexual practice is not morally acceptable, and deep offence may be caused if the subject is not handled with great sensitivity.”

(Churchmead Church of England (VA) School)

“Woodard recognises the need to address homosexuality and the need to provide education related to the spread of HIV/AIDS which will, of necessity, include reference to homosexuals, bisexuals and heterosexuals. Woodard and the academy will not permit the promotion of homosexuality. Objective discussion of homosexuality may take place in the classroom.”

(St Peter’s Academy, The Sir Robert Woodard Academy)

It is not uncommon for Catholic schools to explicitly teach that homosexual acts are morally wrong. While they may teach that LGBT orientation is not morally wrong, some use words suggesting that homosexuality is “disordered” or otherwise unnatural.

Church of England and other Christian schools do not explicitly teach that homosexuality is wrong, but some do use wording that could be interpreted as negative, e.g. teaching about LGBT primarily through teaching about AIDS.

Some Jewish schools and Al-Hijrah School have policies indicating that prohibition against homosexual acts is taught.

5. Some Catholic schools teach masturbation is wrong

“The Church teaches that masturbation is wrong in that it can be seen as a form of self – indulgence. This is not what the act of sex is intended to be. God, the Creator, designed it as the special means by which man and a woman can give themselves to one another. Masturbation encourages us to live in a fantasy world rather than to find fulfilment through working hard at a relationship in the real world. It can teach us to regard others as sex objects, rather than people in their own right.”

(All Saints Catholic School and Technology College)

The only policies found that make direct references to masturbation were those of Catholic Schools, which state that they promote the Catholic Church’s teachings on the subject (i.e. prohibition).

6. Some Jewish and Muslim schools may teach taboos surrounding menstruation

“...among the various types of pads, tampons may not be appropriate due to insertion.”

(Al-Hijrah School)

Al-Hijrah School discourages the use of tampons. Two Jewish schools refer to Leviticus in their teachings about relationships, which includes prohibiting sex with a woman on her period.

3. Basic statistics

This study examined the Sex & Relationships Education (SRE) policies or equivalent from the websites of 634 state secondary (including middle-deemed secondary and all-through) faith schools in England, between February and April 2018. This included all schools with a designated Catholic, Church of England, Christian, Muslim or Jewish religious character or religious ethos. A comprehensive SRE policy could not be found for 300 schools (47%). Nine schools did not have functioning websites at the time of the study.

Out of the 334 schools where an SRE policy was found, 257 (77%) indicated that SRE is delivered according to the teachings of the school's religious ethos. A breakdown of these stats according to the religious character of the schools is given below.

Inability to locate the SRE policy on the school's website does not necessarily mean that the school does not have one. In some cases, the website states that all policies aside from statutory information must be requested by email. In other cases, the policy may simply be difficult to locate, e.g. it may not be located in the “policies” section of the website. In the case of academies, the academy trust may have a blanket policy, but in some cases a link to this policy may not be provided by an individual school within the trust.

It should be noted that in certain cases, faith schools that discourage internet use have also rejected SRE. One example is state Orthodox Jewish school Beis Yaakov Primary School, not included in this study which looks only at secondary schools. In 2017, the National Secular Society discovered a “[Visitor's Guide](#)” on their website that stated “Sexual matters may not be spoken about in any context”, “Personal relationships must not be discussed at all,” and “All references to TV programmes and the Internet should be avoided”.

Catholic schools

Despite including schools of other faiths, this report focuses mainly on Catholic schools for several reasons. Catholic schools represent more schools in the secondary sector than those of any other religious designation; they are more likely to feature an SRE policy on their website than those of schools of other religions; their policies are usually less secularised than those of other Christian and Jewish schools; and their policies tend to be more detailed and more explicit.

A total of 334 voluntary aided schools and academies with a Catholic religious designation were examined. Out of this, an SRE policy could not be found on the websites of 144 schools (43%). Six lacked functioning websites.

Out of the remaining 184 schools where an SRE policy was found, only one school, the [Academy of](#)

St Nicholas (formerly Enterprise South Liverpool Academy) has a generally secular RSE policy, with no reference to Christianity/Catholicism within the policy itself.

Every other school's policy makes it clear that SRE is delivered within the teachings of Catholicism. To what extent Catholic teachings are stressed in SRE varies greatly from school to school. Where their policies mention topics deemed controversial, such as abortion, the majority of schools will indicate that the Catholic Church's views on the topic will be taught, but only a few state explicitly what those views are.

Many policies also do not indicate whether the Catholic Church's views are introduced in neutral terms alongside other viewpoints, for pupils to make their own minds up, or whether they are promoted as the "correct" view with other viewpoints dismissed. However, some schools are more explicit in their policies regarding the Catholic Church's stance on particular issues, and these are cited throughout this report.

Church of England schools

A total of 211 academies, foundation schools, free schools, voluntary aided schools and voluntary controlled schools with a Church of England religious designation were examined. Out of this, a full SRE policy could not be found on the websites of 96 schools (46%). Three lacked functioning websites.

Out of the remaining 112 schools where an SRE policy was found, 49 schools (44%) had policies that were completely secular, or generally secular. Completely secular refers to policies that have no references to religion at all. Generally secular refers to policies where religion is referenced in the general introduction to the school's broad ethos, but with no evidence that it has any bearing on the SRE policy itself. It also refers to policies that state some (but not all) aspects of SRE are introduced in Religious Education (RE). This may also be found in policies of non-faith schools; some choose to introduce discussions of moral and ethical issues relating to SRE within the RE curriculum.

The percentage of C of E schools that have secular SRE policies is in stark contrast to the situation in Catholic schools, where all but one policy are clear that SRE is delivered within the teachings of Catholicism.

The remaining 63 schools vary in what they teach at SRE, and to what extent they promote the views of the Church of England. Some policies state that they do not aim to promote Church views (although they do introduce them); others make it very clear that they aim to promote Church teachings.

Like the Catholic schools, examples were found in C of E schools of SRE policies teaching that marriage (occasionally clarified as "Christian marriage") is the "ideal" state for sexual activity. However, there are no explicit statements that abortion or contraception is wrong. There are a few examples of problematic

wording regarding attitudes towards sexual orientation.

Christian schools

A total of 70 academies, free schools, voluntary aided schools and voluntary controlled schools with a non-specific Christian religious designation or religious ethos were examined. Out of this, a full SRE policy could not be found on the websites of 39 schools (56%).

Out of the remaining 31 schools where an SRE policy was found, 26 schools (84%) have policies that are completely secular or generally secular. In other words, only 5 schools have policies that state SRE is taught according to Christian teachings. Again, the extent of these teachings varies.

Muslim schools

A total of 15 academies, free schools, and voluntary aided schools with a Muslim religious designation were examined. Out of this, a full SRE policy could only be found on the website of one school ([Al-Hijrah School](#)).

Al-Hijrah School has some unusual and potentially problematic items in its policy not seen in the schools of other faiths. This includes discouraging the use of tampons.

Jewish schools

A total of 13 academies, free schools, and voluntary aided schools with a Jewish religious designation were examined. Out of this, a full SRE policy could not be found on the websites of 7 schools (54%).

Out of the remaining 6 schools where an SRE policy was found, only one school ([JCoSS](#)) has a policy that is generally secular.

The remaining 5 schools are generally less explicit in their policies than Catholic schools on what religious teachings on specific aspects of SRE are. However, there are still aspects of some Jewish schools' SRE policies that are problematic.

The lack of SRE policies at 7 of the schools is a concern, because the National Association of Jewish Orthodox Schools (NAJOS) has demonstrated a particular resistance to impartial sex-positive SRE. [Its response](#) to the government's consultation on SRE stated, "Our Daas Torah guides that there is no 'age-appropriate' way to teach primary or secondary school children about same-sex marriage or transgenderism." Note the censoring of the word "sex."

Inconsistent naming of "Sex and Relationship Education"

"Sex and Relationship Education" or "SRE" are not standardised terms. The term "Relationship and Sex Education" or "RSE" is also widespread. Although the government previously referred to the subject as "Sex and Relationship Education"/"SRE", more recent documents usually refer to "Relationship and Sex

Education/RSE". Both terms are widely seen in across the policies of all the schools in this study.

Some Catholic schools avoid the term "sex" or "relationships" altogether. For example, [De Lisle Catholic School Loughborough Leicestershire](#) calls it "Education for personal relationships". [All Saints RC School](#) calls it "Family Life Education" and [St Augustine's Catholic High School](#) refers to the specific policy on SRE as "Family life policy". [Saint George Catholic Voluntary Aided College Southampton](#) calls it simply "Relationships Education," and explains why thus:

"In accordance with the aspirations of our Mission Statement it is our responsibility to ensure that our students receive an informative, appropriate and sensitive education in sexual matters throughout the years of their college life in the context of the teaching of the Catholic Church. In practice, therefore, sex education is referred to within the college as Relationships Education."

(Saint George Catholic Voluntary Aided College Southampton)

The changing of the name from SRE/RSE to something avoiding reference to sex (or even relationships) hints at the particular ideology of the policy, e.g. one promoting religious ideals of family over facts about sex.

Development of SRE policies

A number of schools base their policies on broader policies set by a wider authority, such as an academy trust or diocese. Even in these cases there is freedom for schools to tailor their policies, so this study has examined the policies of each individual school itself rather than the broader policies of the governing authority.

Many Catholic schools use resources created by the Catholic Education Service (CES) for the delivery of SRE and in writing their SRE policies. This is reflected in some of the policy wording, which sometimes appears to be taken from CES documents such as their [model policy for relationship & sex education](#) and [model Secondary Catholic RSE curriculum](#).

4. Primary goal of SRE at many faith schools: To impart religious values about sex and relationships

Sex and relationships education (SRE) for the 21st century states that high quality SRE "treats sex as a normal and pleasurable fact of life."

But a large number of Catholic schools' SRE policies make it explicit from the outset that the school teaches sex as something divine. Multiple policies use the following wording:

"The defining belief of Christianity is that God took on human form. This endows the human form with an extraordinary dignity that goes beyond that of all other forms of life and shows that humanity alone can embrace this relationship with God. Therefore, our relationship with our own bodies is not casual but infused with the Holy Spirit. Any teaching about love and sexual relationships in school must be rooted in this belief which is expressed in the Church's teaching about relationships, marriage, sex and family life."

(Newman Catholic School, and others)

Sexuality is commonly referred to as a "gift from God" in the policies. Two schools, [Coloma Convent Girls' School](#) and [St Angela's Ursuline School](#), refer to sexuality as a "mystery." [Saint Gregory's Catholic College](#) even includes a creationist sentiment in its SRE policy: "We are not some casual product of evolution. Each of us is the result of a thought of God."

A number of schools make it clear that they are opposed to the teaching of sex in purely scientific terms, or other terms that seek to give the basic "facts of life" without an underlying ideology. Some of the policy wording that expresses this includes:

"...An approach to human sexuality which confers on the sexual expression of loving intimacy its proper dignity and understanding as a profound sign of the covenant of love between a man and a woman. This positive approach excludes anything which risks reducing the understanding of sex to the level of a mere bodily function or biological process."

(St Angela's Ursuline School)

"...inform our students of the teachings of the Catholic Church so they can have informed consciences, make the right decisions about relationships and behaviour and understand that sex is not merely a bodily function, biological process or recreational activity."

(St John Fisher Catholic Voluntary Academy)

“For the purposes of clarity, listed below are positions and approaches which are contrary to the school’s ethos: Approaches to sex which undermine the coherent message of the Church... The presentation of sex as a mere bodily function or biological process”
(Coloma Convent Girls’ School)

“Where human sexuality does form part of the syllabus it is never discussed in a vacuum, but is presented as an essential feature of interpersonal relationships, growing out of the friendship, love and respect found between a woman and a man. It is set within the clear, moral framework of the Catholic Church, with strong emphasis on the stability of marriage, family life and the responsibility of parenthood.”
(St Michael’s Catholic Grammar School)

“human sexuality is one of God’s wonderful gifts that has its proper place within marriage and family life...sex and relationship education will provide a clear Christian vision of married life and will be faithful to the church’s teaching that this is the appropriate context for sexual relationships”
(St Michael’s Catholic School)

The teaching of sex as a divine gift from God is expressed in the Catholic Education Service’s [model Secondary Catholic RSE curriculum](#), which states that that pupils should be taught “To appreciate sensual pleasure as a gift from God”.

Because the Catholic Church teaches that sexuality is divine, Catholic schools see a necessity of making the teaching of morals – strictly Catholic morals – a central component of SRE. Catholic schools are opposed to any form of SRE that does not include these morals. Multiple school policies quoted this wording from the Catholic Church in their SRE policies:

“The Church is formally opposed to an often widespread form of imparting sex information dissociated from moral principles”
(Carmel College, and others)

In some cases, it could be argued that the teaching of Catholic ideology around sexuality is given greater emphasis than teaching the facts about sex itself. [De Lisle Catholic School Loughborough Leicestershire](#) lists “to impart Christian ideals to the students and build upon these values” as the first objective in its policy document. [Sacred Heart High School](#) states, “As Catholic teachers we see it as our task to enable our students to make responsible decisions about their sexual activity based on genuine Christian values.”

The [Department for Education recommends](#) that “sex and relationship education is delivered through the PSHE and Citizenship framework”. But it is clear

that some Catholic Schools prioritise the instilling of Catholic beliefs over imparting facts about sex by teaching it primarily as part of Religious Education. [Blessed Robert Sutton Catholic Sports College](#)’s policy shows the majority of SRE education is taught during RE lessons. [St Aloysius RC College](#) even explicitly states that it considers sex education to be primarily the domain of RE:

“The RE department takes the largest responsibility in teaching an appreciation of the nature of sexuality and an understanding of the moral responsibilities placed on Roman Catholics by the Church in accordance with the current approved syllabus issued by the Diocese of Westminster. In delivering this syllabus the RE staff will ensure the following: 1. Only the doctrine of the Roman Catholic Church is taught.”
(St Aloysius RC College)

Two schools attempt to justify teaching Catholic ideology by stating that it can serve a social purpose by reducing teenage pregnancies, despite the fact that Catholic teachings prohibit artificial contraception and abortion:

“In Newham there are higher than average rates of a STIs and unplanned Teenage Pregnancy. As a school we want to equip our students with first and foremost the Catholic values, relevant knowledge, and attitudes to develop the self-confidence and self esteem to ensure they do not engage in early sexual activity.”
(St Angela’s Ursuline School)

“Our expectation is that good SRE is life affirming and that it should assist in reducing the number of teenage pregnancies and abortions. It can do this by helping to develop young peoples’ self-esteem and belief in the value of married life alongside the behaviours necessary to resist pressures for early sexual activity and sexual relationships outside marriage. In all these matters it will be essential that pupils in our schools develop knowledge and understandings of the teachings of the Church.”
(St Anselm’s Catholic School, Canterbury)

[The Trinity Catholic School](#) also attempts to rationalise Catholic teachings on sex in terms of general societal benefit:

“Although the ‘Catholic Sexual Moral Code’ is seen by many as being extremely strict it arose:...To foster the emotional well being of the maximum number of people....To prevent the spread of incurable STDs and is shared by peoples of many Christian and non Christian faiths.”
(The Trinity Catholic School A Voluntary Academy)

The SRE policies found for Church of England and other Christian schools are generally more secular

than those of Catholic schools. However, notable exceptions exist.

The teaching of sex as something divine was also found in the policies of some Church of England and general Christian schools:

“Sex is not only a given fact of human existence but in Christian and Muslim belief a gift of God as part of Creation.”

(Archbishop Temple School, A Church of England Specialist College)

“Sex is a gift of God as part of his creation; it is a physical expression of the spiritual qualities of love, joy, hope and commitment; it deepens and intensifies a relationship as it draws the participants closer together spiritually and physically.”

(Bishop Justus CofE School)

“...sex is a good gift of a good God who wants what is best for people he loves.”

(Bede Academy)

“We will teach within a framework of Christian values and the Christian understanding that sex is a gift of God as part of creation.”

(Magnus Church of England Academy)

Some C of E and Christian schools make direct reference to the Bible as a key source for guidance on SRE:

“We are committed to the Bible as God’s Word, and believe that in it, God reveals himself to us, as well as his plan for human relationships...We believe that the Bible outlines the best for human relationships and the ESF [Emmanuel Schools Foundation] is not required to promote views that are contrary to its ethos.”

(Bede Academy)

“As a Christian School we believe that the scriptures provide guidance and principles for humans on how to behave to fulfil themselves in relationships.”

(Holywell School)

The most prominent example of a C of E school placing primary emphasis on Christian teachings in an SRE policy is possibly [Wren Academy](#). Its policy begins with a fairly lengthy “Theological Rationale,” which includes the following statements:

“Human sexuality is an essential dimension of personal identity, created and designed by God, reflecting his own self-giving nature, and forming a fundamental part of his gift of life through continuing creation...For these reasons, sex and relationship education is placed firmly within the context of relationship as it is there that sexuality grows and develops. Rather than seeing sexual

acts as merely recreational activity, Christian teaching offers a more profound understanding of the joy and depth of human sexual relationships. This involves not only the development of self-esteem and a growing ability to understand and live moral lives based on Gospel values of love, peace, justice and personal responsibility; but also a deepening sense of wonder at the mystery of life as well as an ability to make autonomous and responsible moral decisions.”

(Wren Academy)

The majority of Jewish schools’ SRE policies are similar to the Catholic policies in that they present sex as a gift from God, and that teachings on sex education are drawn from scripture:

“The school recognises the religious authority of the Chief Rabbi of the United Hebrew Congregations of the Commonwealth... The programme is delivered within a moral Jewish framework and within the understanding that sex is a gift of G-d as part of creation.”

(King David High School (Liverpool))

“We will teach it within a framework of Jewish values and the Jewish understanding that sex is a gift of God as part of creation.”

(JFS)

“The area of the curriculum pertaining to sex education and relationships of is handled in a very sensitive manner in the context of the school ethos which reflects the Orthodox Jewish point of view based on the Torah and Talmud.”

(Hasmonean High School, The King David High School (Manchester))

Three of the schools (Beis Yaakov High School, Hasmonean High School and The King David High School in Manchester) state that SRE is delivered through the Jewish Studies curriculum. Hasmonean High School and the King David High School elaborate:

“Relevant Biblical and Talmudic texts are used by experienced Jewish Studies teachers to discuss the Torah attitude to many aspects of sexual morality including inter-gender relationships, homosexuality, rape and the Torah attitude to the family (e.g. the Flood and its causes; destruction of Sodom; The Family Life of the Patriarchs and Matriarchs; the chapters in Leviticus dealing with relationships, and likewise in the relevant Talmudic texts).”

(Hasmonean High School, The King David High School (Manchester))

Additionally, Hasmonean High School states that although SRE is delivered through both the Jewish Studies curriculum and the Biology curriculum, aspects of the Jewish Studies curriculum are carried

directly across to Biology, essentially mixing science and religion:

“The Jewish Studies Department has devised a lecture/discussion to be delivered by experienced Jewish Studies teachers to Biology groups as an introduction to the subject of procreation. This approach sets the religious, moral and family contexts for the teaching of the Biology Department...”

(Hasmonean High School)

Beis Yaakov High School’s policy even states that pupils are “...safeguarded from materials which are inappropriate for their age or would go against their religious and cultural beliefs.”

Al-Hijrah School states that its SRE policy has been developed with “reference to Qur’an and Sunnah” and states “Learning to make choices based on reward and the Pleasure of Allah (SWT)” as a learning goal.

5. Anti-secularism

Because Catholic schools teach that sex is divine, and must therefore be taught in the context of Catholic morals, some Catholic schools are openly critical of secular values which they perceive as being contrary to the morals of the Catholic Church. Some of the more divisive and explicit anti-secularist/secular sentiments expressed in SRE policies include:

“There may be a need to stand against the prevailing secular and permissive culture, and to protect children from lessons in human sexuality which are explicit, premature or misleading.”

(St Angela’s Ursuline School)

“The Education for Personal Relationships Policy has the following aims:...To enable students to challenge assumptions on sexuality in the secular society in which they live.”

(St Bernard’s Catholic Grammar School)

“For the purposes of clarity, listed below are positions and approaches which are contrary to the school’s ethos:

Secularism, relativism

- ***A secularised approach which puts God at the margin of life***
- ***All that is unworthy in relationships (disrespect, exploitation, dishonesty, abuse, etc)***
- ***Moral systems which deny the reality of good and evil, or which substitute personal choice, individual conscience, relativism, or the pursuit of pleasure.***
- ***Whatever is objectively contrary to the virtues of modesty and chastity is to be rejected.”***

(Coloma Convent Girls’ School)

“Now is the time for those who make intemperate attacks on schools with a religious character to be challenged about their assumptions. They lack an understanding of the role that religious faith plays in our society and show little respect for the choice of education that many parents want for their children. If our endeavour to “promote equality”, “encourage acceptance of diversity”, and emphasise the “importance of both rights and responsibilities”, are to be anything more than just fine sentiments, then it must also seek to understand more accurately and respect more sincerely those who share a religious faith.”

(Christ The King Catholic High School and Sixth Form Centre, quoting Bishop Malcolm McMahon OP, Chairman of the Catholic Education Service for England and Wales)

St Philip Howard Catholic Voluntary Academy, in addition to criticising “secularization”, even suggests that children raised in non-Catholic families have “less support and security”:

“Young people in Catholic schools come from all sections of society and from varied family backgrounds. For some, home is a secure and happy place where the faith is lived and shared. For others, their families may be of other faiths or little or no beliefs where there may be less support and security. Our young people do not live in isolation from the pressures on them to be sexually active. It is natural for caring adults to want to protect their children and young people from information, attitudes and lifestyles which they themselves find distasteful. It is however important to recognize the power and confusion of informal learning from personal family problems, marriage and relationship breakups, experience of friends, peer group pressure, influence of the media, declining values of society and secularization.”

(St Philip Howard Catholic Voluntary Academy)

Other policy wording is not so explicitly critical of secular values, but reveals deep mistrust and even disdain for the wider, non-religious society:

“We seek consistent application of our principles across the whole curriculum that the truth of the Gospel must prevail over culture.”

(Coloma Convent Girls’ School)

“It is not easy to approach the issue of sex education in an age when sexuality tends to be trivialised and impoverished. It can only be seen within the broader framework of an education for love, for mutual self-giving. In such a way, the language of sexuality would not be sadly impoverished but illuminated and enriched.”

(St Cuthbert’s RC High School, quoting Pope Francis)

“We are also aware that a variety of influences have encouraged some people to become sexually aware and active at a relatively early age and in situations distanced from the Gospel and the Church’s teaching. Further, the values of ‘society’ and the prevailing culture portrayed by the media are often at odds with the gospel message of growth through genuine love.”

(St James’ Catholic High School)

Christ The King Catholic High School and Sixth Form Centre’s policy even includes a quote from the Catholic Bishops’ Conference 2004 criticising government policies on sex education, calling them “morally corrosive”:

“In the context of high rates of sexually transmitted diseases and of teenage pregnancies government-sponsored sex education has tended to emphasise the importance of ‘safe’ or ‘safer sex’ and has encouraged the use of condoms as the best solution to unwanted pregnancy and the health risks of casual sexual liaisons.

However, this approach has been both morally corrosive and practically ineffective – from 1996 to 2002 incidents of the major bacterial sexually transmitted infections more than doubled (Renewing the focus: HIV and other Sexually Transmitted Infections in the United Kingdom in 2002, Health Protection Agency). This strategy suffers from the assumption that social and moral problems can be solved in a technical way without addressing questions of behaviour. Sex education should stress the importance of the virtue of chastity, and should promote the value of virginity before marriage and of constancy within marriage. To give instruction on the biology of human reproduction without a principled moral context ignores and obscures what is most specifically human in human sexuality.”

(Christ The King Catholic High School and Sixth Form Centre, quoting Catholic Bishops’ Conference 2004)

Anti-secularist sentiments of this kind were not found in the SRE policies of any other faith school examined for this report. However, the C of E [Kings of Wessex Academy](#) stated in its SRE policy that its teachings included “Appreciating the value of the Christian attitude to the family and a Christian upbringing” (underline added).

6. Policies on teaching about marriage

Practically all faith school SRE policies emphasise the importance of marriage. However, the policies of Catholic schools rarely comment on marriage as a civil institution offering practical legal protections for the couple and any children involved. Instead, they stress the sacredness of Christian marriage as part of “God’s plan”:

“Traditional (Christian) marriage should be promoted as the fundamental building block of society and of family life and as the proper context for the nurture of children.”

(John Henry Newman Catholic College)

“The Catholic Church has clear teachings and guidelines on the issues of relationships between the sexes...The school upholds these principles and promotes the ideal of one partner in life who is faithful within the sacrament of marriage.”

(The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College)

“The school’s Catholic ethos of joy will celebrate marriage between a man and a woman as the God given space for human sexual expression”

(Coloma Convent Girls’ School)

“For the purposes of clarity, listed below are positions and approaches which are contrary to the school’s ethos: ...Treating alternative relationships as equivalent to marriage”

(Coloma Convent Girls’ School)

“Marriage as the equal union of a man and a woman who love each other and commit to each other before God and the community. Marriage is the place for the sexual expression of loving intimacy open to life. Christian marriage expresses the truth about married love and can serve as a prophecy which proclaims a human being’s real needs: that a man and a woman are called upon from the beginning to live in a communion of life and love, and that this communion leads to a strengthening of the dignity of the spouses, the good of the children and of society itself.”

(St Angela’s Ursuline School)

“Human sexuality is a holy mystery and part of the identity of each person as man or as woman. Human sexuality is an expression of the physical and spiritual difference between a man and a woman, and that they are complementary. This is part of God’s plan for human love and marriage.”

(St Angela’s Ursuline School)

It should be noted that the term “Christian marriage” excludes other forms of marriage not held by the Church, i.e. civil marriages (including same-sex marriage) and marriages in other religions.

Many Catholic schools openly state that because they consider marriage sacred, sex outside of Christian marriage is wrong:

“The Catholic Church teaches that sex is a gift from God to enable two people to express their exclusive love for each other and to help continue God’s work of creation. Thus sexual intercourse should only take place within the firm commitment of marriage.”

(All Saints Catholic School and Technology College)

“Human sexuality (is a gift of God and) finds its perfect expression within loving life-long marriage. Any other physical sexual expression falls short to some degree of that ideal. It follows that human sexuality is not fulfilled in self-gratification or in promiscuous or casual relationships.”

(Bishop Challoner Catholic College, John Henry Newman Catholic College)

“For the purposes of clarity, listed below are positions and approaches which are contrary to the school’s ethos: ...Condoning extramarital sexual acts or a recreational approach to sex”

(Coloma Convent Girls’ School)

“God’s holy gift of sexual intercourse is reserved for the permanent commitment of marriage, expressive of the bond of mutual love and open to God’s gift of new life.”

(St James’ Catholic High School)

“We should only completely give ourselves bodily to the person we completely love. Marriage is therefore the most appropriate relationship for the full use of the gift of sexuality.”

(The John Fisher School)

“The proper setting for full sexual relationship between a man and a woman is in the Church’s teaching a marriage relationship.”

(Holy Trinity School)

This sentiment is also expressed in the Catholic Education Service’s [model Secondary Catholic RSE curriculum](#), which states pupils should be taught “To recognise that sexuality is a God-given gift and that sexual intercourse is the most intimate expression of human love and should be delayed until marriage.”

The [Trinity Catholic School](#) attempts to rationalise its teachings prohibiting sex outside of marriage by saying that it limits the transmission of STIs and protects women from emotional abuse:

“Sexual Intercourse – Is for within marriage – prevents or limits the emotional abuse, especially of women, STDs, unwanted children, AIDS etc., mental harm caused by subsequent rejection.”
(The Trinity Catholic School A Voluntary Academy)

“Promiscuity – Morally wrong – debases sexual relationships – devalues personal feeling of worth – encourages STDs, unwanted pregnancy, cervical cancer. AIDS etc.”
(The Trinity Catholic School A Voluntary Academy)

Although no C of E or other Christian schools openly stated in their SRE policies that sex outside of marriage is “wrong,” many did stress that marriage (sometimes specifically “Christian” marriage) is the “ideal” context for sexual activity:

“Whatever the specific content of the syllabus, church schools will continue to place sex education within the framework of a Christian understanding of sex and human relationships, which stresses the importance of a faithful marriage as the best framework for sex”
(St George’s Church of England Foundation School)

“Our beliefs and values arise out of the Christian tradition and our teaching and approach to sex education draws primarily on the teachings of the Church of England. Christianity teaches the ideal of sexual relationships taking place within the framework of the sacrament of marriage.”
(St Peter’s Academy)

“The School will, in all its relationships and sex education, aim to ensure that young people are encouraged and enabled to consider positively the family as fundamental social unit and the ideal of sexual expression taking place within Christian marriage.”
(Bennett Memorial Diocesan School)

“Marriage is God’s ideal intended context for sex and the raising of children. God’s ideal is for a lifelong marriage commitment.”
(Bishop Justus CofE School)

“Our teaching stresses the importance of responsible sexual behaviour within a loving, caring relationship, ideally within a marriage.”
(St Martin in the Fields High School for Girls)

“Our beliefs and values arise out of the Christian tradition and our teaching and approach to sex education draws primarily on the teachings of the Church of England. Christianity teaches the ideal of sexual relationships taking place within the framework of the sacrament of marriage.”
(The Sir Robert Woodard Academy)

“In relationships outside marriage (or other long term stable relationships) abstinence from sexual activity is considered worthwhile.”
(Bishop Perowne CofE College)

Bede Academy furthermore outlines what can be defined as “marriage”:

“In British law marriage is between two consenting adults, but we recognise that many Christian churches understand the Bible to teach that marriage is the union of one man and one woman for life. As well as this being the position of the Church of England and the Roman Catholic Church, it is also the teaching of other faiths.”
(Bede Academy)

None of the Jewish schools made any explicit statements on sex outside of marriage.

Al-Hijrah School teachings on marriage include: *“Sexual morality and sex outside marriage, prohibition of co-habitation, extra-marital, and pre-marital sex together with the Islamic view of it.”*

Furthermore, Al-Hijrah School states that it teaches about polygamy and common law marriage. However, it does not state what it teaches about these concepts. Neither polygamy nor common law marriage are recognised as legal institutions in the UK except in specific limited circumstances which would not apply here; it is unknown if the school’s teachings on these accurately reflect this. This is of concern considering the growing issue of Muslims who are unaware of British laws regarding marriage, and who find themselves unwittingly without legal protections in their relationships as a result.

Some Catholic schools are clear that they reject the concept of divorce:

“Based on the Gospel teaching of Jesus ‘What God has joined together let no man put asunder’ the Church does not recognise the breaking of the contract of a valid marriage.”
(All Saints Catholic School and Technology College)

“To help pupils to understand the nature of marriage as a life-long and exclusive covenant of man and woman and why the Church does not allow divorce and remarriage.”
(Coloma Convent Girls’ School)

“The Catholic Church does not accept that anyone has the right to decree a divorce.”
(Holy Trinity School)

7. Policies on contraception

[Pound, Denford and Shucksmith's study](#) advocates impartiality on pregnancy on contraception in SRE. But many faith schools (mostly Catholic schools) teach a clear stance that most forms of contraception are wrong.

The promotion of being married with children as the ideal is widespread in Catholic schools. Family life including children is taught as a sacred vocation:

“Further objectives of SRE include:...To teach that the vocation to marriage entails the procreation and raising of children.”

(Coloma Convent Girls' School)

“Genuine love is creative”

(Sacred Heart Catholic College)

“Objectives:...To bring about an in depth understanding of the Catholic Sacrament of Marriage as a covenant and sign of the relationship between God and the world through Jesus Christ and an awareness of the problems and pitfalls of marriage such as adultery, divorce and childlessness”

(St Anne's Catholic High School for Girls, underline added)

“Catholic teaching about the importance of sexual relationships: Catholic teaching about sexual relationships as marital, unitive and procreative”

(St Cuthbert's RC High School)

“Marriage is the place for the sexual expression of loving intimacy which is open to life.”

(St Patrick's Catholic College, A Voluntary Catholic Academy)

“Marriage is rooted in the covenant which a man and a woman make when they give themselves in love to each other for the whole of their lives. This is a lasting relationship which is described by the Church as a ‘marriage covenant of conjugal love’. In this covenant of love, the two people give mutual help and service to each other through an intimate union of their persons and actions. Loving self-giving expressed through sexual intimacy is designed to allow married couples to share, by procreation, in the creative work of God.”

(St Angela's Ursuline School)

The [Department for Education states](#), “Knowledge of the different types of contraception, and of access to, and availability of contraception is a major part of the Government's strategy to reduce teenage pregnancy. Effective sex and relationship education in secondary schools has an important role to play in achieving this. Trained staff in

secondary schools should be able to give young people full information about different types of contraception, including emergency contraception and their effectiveness.”

But because children are considered an ideal product of marriage, Catholic schools teach that “artificial” methods of contraception are morally wrong. This is despite the fact that contraceptives, by their very nature, reduce unwanted pregnancies, and condoms offer the best protection against STIs.

“The act of sexual intercourse is also the action through which the human race is continued. Therefore, any sexual acts where the creation of new life has been deliberately ruled out – including the use of artificial contraceptives – must be regarded as a wrong use of sex.”

(All Saints Catholic School and Technology College)

“For the purposes of clarity, listed below are positions and approaches which are contrary to the school's ethos: Interventions against human life...Abortion and artificial birth control (including post-coital birth control) are contrary to our ethos. They will not be promoted, provided, facilitated or condoned.”

(Coloma Convent Girls' School)

“Manipulating human fertility in ways contrary to the church's teaching is rejected.”

(Coloma Convent Girls' School)

“The Papal Encyclical *Humanae Vitae* (1968) stated that the use of artificial contraceptives is contrary to natural law and ‘intrinsically evil’.”

(Sacred Heart High School)

“Those things which devalue and degrade sex or which deny its life-giving potential make us less than the people God intends us to be.”

(St Leonard's Catholic School)

“Artificial Contraception – Divorces sex act from its prime ‘raison d'être’, childbirth. Can result in a debasing of ‘sex’ to the mundane which can degrade sexual relationships and lead to promiscuity.”

(The Trinity Catholic School A Voluntary Academy)

A prohibitive stance is suggested in the Catholic Education Service's [model Secondary Catholic RSE curriculum](#). It says that pupils should be taught “The Church's teaching on the morality of natural and artificial methods of managing fertility.”

[All Saints Catholic School and Technology College](#) states that it does not even condone the use of condoms to prevent serious STIs such as HIV:

“Clearly the Catholic Church supports the view that loyalty to one partner is the best defence against the spread of AIDS. Since the Catholic view is that the full sexual expression of human love is reserved for husband and wife within marriage, it cannot support any measures, which tacitly accept, even if they do not encourage, sexual activity outside marriage.... ‘Nor can we accept that for the unmarried the choices lie between condoms and infection. There is a third course of action: refusal to engage in extra marital sexual activity’ (Cardinal Hume).”
(All Saints Catholic School and Technology College)

St James’ Catholic High School even says that use of contraceptives contributes to marriage breakdown:

“At KS4 the following objectives should be achieved:...Understanding of the sacrament of marriage as a covenant and sign to the world. Appreciate the factors that contribute towards making a marriage dysfunctional: e.g. poor communication, divorce, adultery or a contraceptive mentality.”
(St James’ Catholic High School)

None of the policies of the other Christian or Jewish schools expressly stated an opposition to contraception.

Al-Hijrah School's policy includes “Learning about contraception...within the Islamic framework.” It is not clear what this entails because there are different ideas about contraception within Islam. Some methods are not permitted according to some interpretations, so it would appear that Al-Hijrah’s teachings may include prohibitions on some forms of contraception.

Furthermore, Al-Hijrah lists a number of learning goals under the “Knowledge & Understanding” section of its policy which concludes by stating that unplanned pregnancies will not occur if the goals are all met, even though unplanned pregnancies could still occur in reality under these circumstances:

- a) *Learn that Allah (SWT) is the Creator and Provider for all*
- b) *Understand the purpose of the created*
- c) *Learning and understanding physical development at appropriate stages;*
- d) *Understanding human sexuality, reproduction, sexual health, emotions and relationships;*
- e) *Learn methods to support, control and understand emotions and needs;*
- f) *Know and understand qualities to value in a potential spouse;*
- g) *Learn the importance of marriage and the blessings that are associated with it;*

- h) *Learning about contraception and the range of local and national sexual health advice, contraception and support services, within the Islamic framework;*
- i) *Learning regarding Allah’s guidance for intimate relations with ones spouse in the safe and sacred institution of marriage;*
- j) *Understand that unplanned pregnancies would not occur if all the above is met.*
(Al-Hijrah School)

8. Anti-Abortion

Again, [Pound, Denford and Shucksmith's study](#) recommends that teachings on abortion should be impartial. But Catholic schools generally make it explicit that they teach abortion is morally wrong, because they believe that life begins at conception.

*"The official position of the Catholic Church has consistently been that abortion is the killing of an unborn child, an act of taking a human life."
(Sacred Heart High School)*

*"our ethos as a Catholic school promotes:...The sanctity of human life, and rejects the condoning of abortion and all acts which end innocent human life."
(St Angela's Ursuline School)*

*"Abortion – Morally wrong – sanctity of human life – the unborn given no choice."
(The Trinity Catholic School A Voluntary Academy)*

*"Our teaching about sex, relationships and health will adhere to the following fundamental principles: i. Every human being is created in the image of God ii. Every human life is sacred and "[...] must be respected and protected absolutely from the moment of conception."
(St John Fisher Catholic High School)*

*"The Church's teaching on abortion is quite clear. God created us all in his image and human life is sacred. The question of when this begins has been the cause of debate. The Church states that life begins at conception. The strength of this arrangement lies in the fact that there is no other point in personal development of which we can say 'Human life has now come into being – before this point it did not exist'.
(All Saints Catholic School and Technology College)*

*"For the purposes of clarity, listed below are positions and approaches which are contrary to the school's ethos: Interventions against human life...Abortion and artificial birth control (including post-coital birth control) are contrary to our ethos. They will not be promoted, provided, facilitated or condoned."
(Coloma Convent Girls' School)*

*"Students should be taught to: ...understand that parents are co-creators with God and that human life begins at conception and so is worthy of respect."
(St John Fisher Catholic Voluntary Academy)*

[Holy Trinity School's](#) policy indicates that it will encourage pupils who become pregnant to seek alternatives to abortion:

*"The school will reflect the Catholic churches' teaching on abortion. In responding to individual students needs in response to pregnancy the school must support the belief that every individual human life is owed respect throughout that life. Support and help will be offered that provides alternative to abortion."
(Holy Trinity School)*

No other Christian schools explicitly state in their policy that they teach abortion is wrong. However, Wren Academy's wording on the subject may suggest a bias:

*"It is accepted that abortion is an emotive issue and that any teaching must present a balanced view which respects a range of religious beliefs and which takes into account the law relating to abortion. It provides an opportunity to distinguish between fact and fiction (e.g. the stage at which human life commences) and values clarification (e.g. in what circumstances, if any, abortion is a positive choice). Religious Studies curriculum contributes to the ethical debate)."
(Wren Academy)*

The inclusion of "distinguish between fact and fiction" on "the stage at which human life commences" is strange, because there are no specific facts on this; the stage at which a foetus can be considered "human life" is a philosophical point with no clear factual answer. Additionally, the phrasing of "in what circumstances, if any, abortion is a positive choice" suggest a disapproval of abortion.

Abortion is mentioned in the policy of only one Jewish school ([King David High School](#) in Liverpool). The policy does not indicate the school's stance on the issue.

[Al-Hijrah School](#) states that it teaches the "Islamic view of abortion." This would generally suggest prohibition in most circumstances.

9. Anti-homosexuality

Pound, Denford and Shucksmith's study states: "SRE should reflect sexual diversity. It should discuss a range of sexual activity (not just heterosexual intercourse), as well as lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender issues and relationships."

While this diversity is covered in the policies of many faith schools in this report, a significant proportion of them do so in a way that presents heterosexuality and heterosexual activities as the "ideal", while LGBT activities are marginalised or condemned.

According to Stonewall's 2017 **"School Report"** on the experiences of LGBT young people, just 10% LGBT pupils at faith schools have learnt about where to go for help and advice about same-sex relationships at school, compared to 20% LGBT pupils overall. Similarly, only 10% LGBT pupils at faith schools learn about safe sex in relation to same-sex relationships, compared to 20% overall.

The effect this has on LGBT pupils is not negligible. Stonewall's **"School Report"** quotes one pupil at a secondary faith school who says, "In religious education we learnt that the Bible was against anything other than heterosexuality. I was so scared. I had to teach myself everything. What we learnt in religious education about how we are viewed by our peers, teachers and parents made people terrified." Additionally, LGBT pupils of faith are somewhat more likely to have tried to take their own life than those who are not of faith (30 per cent compared to 25 per cent).

Although Catholic schools broadly teach that homophobic bullying is unacceptable and not tolerated, it is nevertheless the case that they accept the Catholic Church's teaching on homosexuality, which is prohibitive of any homosexual activity. Schools generally try to justify this position by drawing a distinction between homosexuality as an orientation, and homosexual activities. They state that while homosexuality itself is not wrong, acting upon homosexual feelings is prohibited. In Catholic teachings, sex is a privilege reserved for men and women within a Christian marriage, and then only when there is a possibility of conception.

"The Catholic Church's understanding the fact that homosexual orientation is distinguished from the evaluation of the sexual activity of homosexual people. The latter is deemed unacceptable as it does not respect the complimentary nature of male and female since it lacks the life giving potential to proper sexual love."
(Holy Trinity School)

"As Christian teachers our attempts to enable our students to reach the truth of this matter include the following factors. (a) Encouraging an awareness of the best contemporary scientific information about all aspects of homosexuality;

(b) recognizing the importance of a distinction between homosexuality as a personal sexual orientation (whether permanent or temporary) and sexual activity between homosexual persons"
(Sacred Heart High School)

"The aims of teaching about homosexuality and responding to students' questions and concerns should be: ...To enable students to understand the Catholic teaching on prejudice, compassion, love and homosexuality. That to express homosexuality itself is not evil or sinful. However, the Catholic Church teaches that homosexual acts go against the natural order."
(St Peter's Catholic School and Specialist Science College)

Worryingly, **St John's Catholic Comprehensive** even has a separate "Challenging Homophobic Behaviour" policy that reinforces this idea that it is wrong for LGBT individuals to act upon their feelings:

"Although it is clear that the Church teaches that sexual intercourse finds its proper place and meaning only in marriage and does not share the assumption common in some circles that every adult person needs to be sexually active. This teaching applies to all, whether married or unmarried, homosexual or heterosexual, engaged, single through choice, widowed or divorced"
(St John's Catholic Comprehensive, quoting Catholic Bishops' Conference)

"It is necessary to distinguish between sexual orientation or inclination, and engaging in sexual (genital) activity, heterosexual or homosexual. Neither a homosexual nor a heterosexual orientation leads inevitably to sexual activity."
(St John's Catholic Comprehensive, quoting Cardinal Basil Hume)

It is of particular concern that this same policy also offers to provide "guidance" to families of pupils who are LGBT – guidance that is clearly directed by Catholic teachings:

"Such families should be given respectful pastoral guidance, so that those who manifest a homosexual orientation can receive the assistance they need to understand and fully carry out God's will in their lives."
(St John's Catholic Comprehensive, quoting Pope Francis)

In addition to alienating LGBT pupils and teachers by teaching that homosexual acts are wrong, many schools use terms that suggest homosexuality itself is an abnormality or problematic:

“The Catholic Church accepts that, generally speaking, homosexuality as a condition is not a matter of choice. However, while all human beings are called to love, the Church does not believe that sexual activity is necessary to the expression of this love; witness the value it attaches to celibacy and the vow of virginity. In fact, the church teaches that the full sexual expression of love is reserved for husband and wife in marriage and that this sexual expression of love must be open to the possibility of new life. Hence, the Catholic Church does not accept homosexuality in practice. It does not believe that sexual acts between persons of the same sex are morally right in principle. The Church bases this teaching on Biblical theology and on its Philosophy of Natural Law. However, the Church is aware of the special problems of homosexuals and would stress in this regard the love of Jesus for all. We are all created by God and the possibility of repentance and forgiveness for sexual sins is open to all.”

(All Saints Catholic School and Technology College, underline added)

“Homosexuality – Not what the reproductive faculty evolved for – divorces sexuality from its reproductive capacity.”

(The Trinity Catholic School A Voluntary Academy)

“The number of men and women who have deep-seated homosexual tendencies is not negligible. This inclination, which is objectively disordered, constitutes for most of them a trial.”

(Saint John Bosco College, quoting the Catechism)

St Patrick’s Catholic College also refers to LGBT people as “disordered” and tries to explain it away:

“In upholding the dignity of people who are homosexual the Church is being consistent to its teaching. There are two fundamental principles which determine the Catholic Church’s teaching on sexual matters. First, the Church has always taught that the sexual (genital) expression of love is intended by God’s plan of creation to find its place exclusively within marriage between a man and a woman. The Church therefore cannot in any way equate a homosexual partnership with a heterosexual marriage. Secondly, the sexual (genital) expression of love must be open to the possible transmission of new life. For these two reasons the Church does not approve of homosexual genital acts. When the Church describes such acts as “intrinsically disordered” (PC para.3), it means that these acts are not consistent with the two fundamental principles mentioned above. It is in this sense that the Church teaches that there can be no moral right to homosexual acts, even though

they are no longer held to be criminal in many secular legal systems. No individual, bishop, priest or layperson, is in a position to change the teaching of the Church which she considered to be God-given. Being a homosexual person is, then, neither morally good nor morally bad; it is homosexual genital acts that are morally wrong.”

(St Patrick’s Catholic College, A Voluntary Catholic Academy, underline added)

Many Catholic Schools defend their teaching that marriage can only be valid between opposite-sex couples. A number of schools used this wording in their policies:

“The Same Sex Couples Act 2013 extends marriage to same sex couples in England and Wales. Teaching about the nature of marriage must reflect this following Catholic Church teaching and guidance. Nothing in the Act affects the Trust’s rights to teach marriage or the position of the Catholic faith on same sex relationships provided it is done in an appropriate, sensitive, reasonable, professional, objective and positive way.”

(Our Lady & St. Bede Catholic Academy, and others)

Christ The King Catholic High School and Sixth Form Centre is also defensive on its general teaching on homosexuality, denying that teaching homosexual acts are sinful could disadvantage LGBT pupils:

“To suggest that teaching PSHE in a way which reflects a Catholic school’s religious ethos will encourage bullying or prejudice of people on the basis of their sexual orientation on a scale greater than might be found in other maintained schools, has no basis in fact.”

(Christ The King Catholic High School and Sixth Form Centre, quoting Bishop Malcolm McMahon)

This is not reflected in statistics by Stonewall, who stated in their 2017 [report](#), “LGBT pupils in faith schools are more likely than those in non-faith schools to say that teachers and school staff never challenge homophobic, biphobic and transphobic language when they hear it (31 per cent compared to 22 per cent).”

Christ The King Catholic High School has some particularly unusual statements in its policies regarding homosexuality. It feels it necessary to state that “anyone who is homosexual is not bound to promote homosexuality or try to convert young people to homosexuality” and that “homosexuality is not the same as paedophilia”.

Church of England and other Christian schools are generally not as explicit as Catholic schools in teaching that homosexual activity is wrong, or that homosexuality itself is “unnatural” or “disordered.” Nevertheless, some of the wording used in the policies

of these schools on the subject of homosexuality is problematic.

[Archbishop Blanch School](#) seems to suggest that homosexuality is a “choice” in its statement on LGBT:

“Gay/lesbian/bi sexual relationships – Learning to make choices based on an understanding of difference and with an absence of prejudice.”
(Archbishop Blanch School)

[Churchmead Church of England \(VA\) School](#) suggests that because homosexual acts are “not morally acceptable” to some, it may teach in a manner that prioritises the avoidance of potentially causing offence over imparting necessary knowledge about LGBT:

“The teaching programme takes into account the sensitive issue of homosexual behaviour. It needs to be dealt with objectively and seriously, bearing in mind the need to acknowledge its relevance for a significant number of people. At the same time it must be also recognised that for many people, including some religious faiths, homosexual practice is not morally acceptable, and deep offence may be caused if the subject is not handled with great sensitivity.”
(Churchmead Church of England (VA) School)

St Peter’s Academy and The Sir Robert Woodard Academy, both of which are in the Woodward Academies Trust, link LGBT directly with AIDS, suggesting that they only introduce LGBT as a necessity to teaching about AIDS/HIV:

“Woodard recognises the need to address homosexuality and the need to provide education related to the spread of HIV/AIDS which will, of necessity, include reference to homosexuals, bisexuals and heterosexuals. Woodard and the academy will not permit the promotion of homosexuality. Objective discussion of homosexuality may take place in the classroom.”
(St Peter’s Academy, The Sir Robert Woodard Academy)

The SRE policies of the Jewish schools [Hasmonean High School](#) and [The King David High School](#) in Manchester make references to the “destruction of Sodom” and “the chapters in Leviticus dealing with Relationships”, both of which are generally taken as teachings that homosexual acts are immoral. [Beis Yaakov High School](#) states that it “safeguards” pupils from teachings that would “would go against their religious and cultural beliefs,” hinting that inclusive attitudes to LGBT relationships may not be taught at all.

[Al-Hijrah’s policy includes](#) “Discussion of homosexuality and lesbianism, including an Islamic view of them.” Traditional Islamic teachings usually forbid homosexuality, as reflected by Islamic nations where homosexual acts are prohibited by law, including some where they carry the death penalty.

10. Promotion of celibacy

[Pound, Denford and Shucksmith’s study](#) recommends that SRE content “should not focus on abstinence.” But in Catholic schools, abstinence from sex is promoted as a virtue, encoded as “chastity” and “celibacy.”

This goes far beyond teaching children to act within the law, or to avoid situations in which they may be vulnerable to exploitation. Celibacy is encouraged and promoted as the correct way to live for those for whom sex is prohibited in Catholic teachings: unmarried, divorced, and LGBT people. Several schools, including [Bishop Challoner Catholic College](#), [John Henry Newman Catholic College](#) and [St Patrick’s Catholic College](#), use the wording: “Life-long celibacy can be fulfilling. In this way of life an individual’s sexual instincts may be channelled into generous love and service of others.”

Other policy wording promoting abstinence as a virtue include:

“For the purposes of clarity, listed below are positions and approaches which are contrary to the school’s ethos: ...The negative approach that regards chastity as old fashioned, unrealistic or unattainable”
(Coloma Convent Girls’ School)

“The Church also reminds parents and schools of the Christian calling to celibacy. In the commitment to an enlightened education in chastity, ‘Christian parents, discerning the signs of God’s call, will devote special attention and care to education in virginity or celibacy as the supreme form of that self-giving that constitutes the very meaning of human sexuality”
(Sacred Heart High School)

“As part of the school’s striving to promote virtuous living, chastity is recognised and encouraged as an aspect of self-awareness and self-control that contribute to growth into full human maturity. Chastity involves continence for those who are single, whether unmarried, separated, divorced, widowed or committed to celibacy, and faithful monogamy for the married.”
(St Angela’s Ursuline School)

A similar emphasis on celibacy was not found in the policies of other faith schools.

11. Working with external parties

It is not uncommon for SRE to make use of external parties. [Pound, Denford and Shucksmith's study](#) recommends that SRE programmes “involve close liaison with relevant sexual health and advice services, either through school-based services or through links with local sexual health services.”

But a large number of Catholic school SRE policies state that the school will seek to ensure its Catholic ethos will be upheld by placing restrictions on what external visitors will be permitted in SRE. Many policies used the following wording:

“Any visitor must adhere to our code of practice developed in line with CES [Catholic Education Service] guidance ‘Protocol for Visitors to Catholic Schools’. Health professionals should follow the school’s policies, minimising the potential for disclosures or inappropriate comments using negotiated ground rules and distancing techniques as other teachers would. They will ensure that all teaching is rooted in Catholic principles and practice.”

Other policy wording stressing that pupils will not be exposed to speakers who may promote different views from the Catholic ethos include:

“It is important that any external visitor to the school is also clear about their role and responsibility while they are in a school. Such visits should complement the school’s current programme. Visitors may need guidance to ensure that sessions they deliver are respectful of the teaching of the Catholic Church.”

([St Columba’s Catholic Boys’ School](#))

“The help of outside agencies and speakers, who are in support of the Roman Catholic ethos of the College, will be sought to support the programme and will be invited to complement the College’s teaching with their professional perspectives.”

([St Thomas a Becket Catholic Secondary School, A Voluntary Academy](#))

“Where it is relevant and necessary to invite speakers into school to speak to the students on sexual matters then they are likely to be representatives of the Church and Health Service Professionals whose attitudes concur with the Catholic ethos of the school.”

([The Barlow RC High School and Specialist Science College](#))

“For the purposes of clarity, listed below are positions and approaches which are contrary to the school’s ethos: ...External agencies which fail to uphold the school’s ethos will not be used.”

([Coloma Convent Girls’ School](#))

Additionally, [Coloma Convent Girls’ School](#) states that websites, DVDs, books and other resources must be approved by the Headteacher before they can be used.

A number of schools, including [Our Lady’s Convent Roman Catholic High School](#), [St Augustine’s Catholic High School](#) and [St John Wall Catholic School](#), state that they use [Ten Ten Theatre](#) as an external speaker. This Catholic theatre company offer their own [RSE resources](#) that promote Catholic teachings on SRE.

Some Catholic schools include residential stays in their SRE curriculum. This includes [St Joseph’s College](#) which holds residential stays at Alton Castle, a [Catholic retreat](#) in which pupils learn “about themselves, the world, but most importantly their relationship with God.”

Similar policies regarding strict control of outside agencies to ensure they comply with the religious ethos of the school were not found in majority of SRE policies of any of the other faith schools in this report. An exception is [St Hild’s Church of England Voluntary Aided School](#):

“Certain aspects of RSE are delivered through external provision by specialists who should uphold St Hild’s ethos of ‘providing world class education in a Christian context’”

([St Hild’s Church of England Voluntary Aided School](#))

[Wren Academy’s policy](#) mentions that external visitors for SRE include a Christian group, e-valueate, and [Hasmonean High School](#) says that external visitors include Jewish Women’s Aid.

The National Secular Society has previously reported on external religious groups evangelising in schools, including groups that promote anti-abortion and anti-LGBT sentiments. For more information please refer to our 2013 [Evangelism in State Schools report](#).

12. Other policies

This is probably a reference to some Islamic teachings that discourage tampons because they can break the hymen in virgin girls.

Anti-masturbation

References to masturbation are relatively unusual in faith school SRE policies, but some were found among those of Catholic schools, and they all state that they will promote the Catholic Church's teachings on the subject. Only one school, [All Saints Catholic School and Technology College](#), states outright what those teachings are:

“The Church teaches that masturbation is wrong in that it can be seen as a form of self-indulgence. This is not what the act of sex is intended to be. God, the Creator, designed it as the special means by which man and a woman can give themselves to one another. Masturbation encourages us to live in a fantasy world rather than to find fulfilment through working hard at a relationship in the real world. It can teach us to regard others as sex objects, rather than people in their own right.”

([All Saints Catholic School and Technology College](#))

A prohibitive stance on masturbation denies the concept of individual bodily autonomy, and also conflicts with recommendations, including those made by [Pound, Denford and Shucksmith's study](#), that SRE should be 'sex-positive'.

Anti-genetics

Many policies state that they will teach what the Catholic Church believes about genetic research and related science. Again, only [All Saints Catholic School and Technology College](#) gives an indication of what that teaching is:

“This principle of the sacredness of human life from the moment of conception is one which the Church would apply to moral debates concerning embryology in general and genetic research in particular.”

([All Saints Catholic School and Technology College](#))

Menstruation

None of the Catholic or other Christian schools' policies appear to give a specific faith perspective on the subject of menstruation. But [Hasmonean High School](#) and [The King David High School](#) refer to Leviticus in their teachings about relationships, which includes prohibiting sex with a woman on her period because she is viewed as “impure” during menstruation.

[Al-Hijrah School](#) states in the “Personal hygiene” section of its policy,

“...among the various types of pads, tampons may not be appropriate due to insertion.”

([Al-Hijrah School](#))

13. Conclusion

Teaching SRE from a religious perspective is generally the norm at state secondary faith schools in England.

While only a few faith schools explicitly state what their teachings are regarding sensitive issues, including sex outside of marriage, contraception, abortion and LGBT, where those teachings are stated there exists considerable scope for contradiction with what is taught at non-denominational schools.

The study ultimately demonstrates the deep conflict that exists between two main duties of a state faith school.

In its capacity as a publicly-funded educational institution, a state faith school (like any other state school) has a duty to provide impartial and factual information about sex and relationships that prioritises the health and welfare of young people. It must also respect and uphold the rights of protected groups including LGBT people, and promote “British values” of democracy, rule of law, individual liberty and respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs.

But unlike other state schools, a faith school it is also bound by the religious organisation that is its foundation or trust to promote the teachings of the faith according to the highest religious authorities it recognises, be they instructions from the Catholic or Anglican Church, or from scripture interpreted as divine commandments.

Where the two authorities (state and church) differ on matters, conflict inevitably arises. This conflict can clearly be seen in the anti-secular sentiments explicitly expressed by some Catholic schools. The problem is pervasive not only in SRE, but throughout faith school education including RE and Science. The irresolvable conflict between what faith schools want to teach and what the state wants them to teach is one reason why state faith schools are a flawed concept from the outset.

But while a third of all state schools are faith schools, government policy must endeavour to ensure pupils at all schools, regardless of their religious ethos, are entitled to the same basic level of SRE. The National Secular Society recommends the following criteria be met for SRE at all schools:

1. SRE must be based on recommendations from healthcare and educational professionals, not religious scripture. Just as science taught in state schools must be based on facts established by scientists rather than religious teachings, so too should SRE be formulated according to evidence-based recommendations of academics and professionals in the fields of healthcare and education rather than religious institutions.

2. SRE must be consistent. While there should of course be a degree of flexibility for schools to adapt

SRE to the specific needs of their school community, all schools should teach the same fundamental points of SRE. There should be no inconsistency between what different schools are teaching in SRE.

3. SRE policies must be visible on the websites of all state schools. Parents, pupils and other stakeholders should be able to access this information in order get a full understanding of what is being taught, and to make an informed choice when selecting schools. SRE policies should be readily accessible and easy to locate on the website, without the need to request a copy by email or otherwise.


4. SRE must be impartial. Schools and teachers should not take a moral stance on issues such as abortion or sex outside of marriage. Pupils should be given the facts, including those regarding the law, and make their own decisions.


5. SRE must be genuinely consistent with the requirements of the Equality Act, including in its teachings on LGBT. It must not suggest in any way that individuals are inferior or less moral on the basis of their marital status, pregnancy/maternity status, religion/belief, sexual orientation, or gender identity. It must include facts about homosexuality, bisexuality, transgender and other LGBT+ orientations as well as heterosexuality. Heterosexual relationships and activities should not be portrayed as more valid or desirable than LGBT ones.


6. The RE curriculum should not be the main mode of delivery for SRE. Any exploration of SRE in the RE curriculum should be supplementary. Personal, Social and Health Education (PSHE), Citizenship and Science are more appropriate contexts for the delivery of the fundamentals of SRE.


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