

Report on the implementation of relationships and sexuality education in grant-aided schools

1. Background

Statutory requirement under the 2023 Regulations

The [Relationships and Sexuality Education \(Northern Ireland\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023](#) introduced new statutory requirements for grant-aided schools to provide age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR), including the prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion, for pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4.

The Regulations were made by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under powers contained within the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2019.

Review of implementation of relationships and sexuality education

The Regulations require the Department of Education to publish a report on the implementation of relationships and sexuality education in grant-aided schools and lay the report before the Northern Ireland Assembly.

This report draws on information available from departmental policy and implementation activity, published guidance, curriculum support materials developed by Council for the Curriculum, Examinations and Assessment (CCEA), and evidence available through Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) publications and inspection findings.

As implementation of the amended requirements is ongoing, the findings presented should be viewed as an assessment of progress to date rather than a definitive evaluation of long-term impact. In addition, Northern Ireland is undergoing a period of significant curriculum reform, including in the area of relationships and sexuality education.

This report has been structured to provide a factual account of implementation activity, the support made available to schools, evidence of delivery where available, and future curriculum developments within the Northern Ireland education system.

The Department has shared copies of the draft report with the organisations specified in Regulation 4(2) of the Regulations.

2. About Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE)

Legislative position - existing statutory requirements

Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) was already a statutory requirement within the Northern Ireland Curriculum prior to the introduction of the 2023 Regulations and continues to be delivered through existing curriculum arrangements.

At primary level, RSE is currently delivered as part of [Personal Development and Mutual Understanding \(PDMU\)](#) and, at post-primary level, through Personal Development, a strand of [Learning for Life and Work \(LLW\)](#). Schools are required to provide learning that supports pupils' personal development, wellbeing, relationships, and decision-making in an age-appropriate manner.

The Department of Education requires all grant-aided schools to maintain an [RSE policy](#) that is developed in consultation with parents and pupils and approved by the Board of Governors. This approach enables schools to deliver RSE within the framework of the Northern Ireland Curriculum while taking account of their individual ethos and circumstances.

As detailed later in this report, since the passage of the Regulations, the Northern Ireland Curriculum has undergone a strategic review and a new framework prepared for consultation.

Amendments introduced by the 2023 Regulations

The [Relationships and Sexuality Education \(Northern Ireland\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023](#) amended existing education legislation to introduce specific requirements relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The Regulations require that pupils at Key Stage 3 and Key Stage 4 receive education that is:

- age-appropriate;
- comprehensive;
- scientifically accurate; and
- focused on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The Regulations further specify that this education must include learning relating to:

- the prevention of early pregnancy; and
- access to abortion.

In addition to curriculum requirements, the Regulations place duties on the Department of Education to issue guidance on the content and delivery of this education, make provision regarding parental requests for withdrawal from relevant aspects of learning, and review the implementation of the new requirements.

Relationship between the Regulations, the CEDAW recommendations and the current statutory curriculum

The 2023 Regulations were introduced by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland under powers contained in the Northern Ireland (Executive Formation etc.) Act 2019.

The Regulations were intended to implement recommendations arising from the report of the [Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women \(CEDAW\)](#) concerning the United Kingdom's obligations under the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.

The Explanatory Note accompanying the Regulations states that pupils in Key Stages 3 and 4 must receive scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights in accordance with the recommendations contained in the CEDAW report and that such education should not advocate or promote any particular opinion.

Rather than creating a new curriculum area, the Regulations build upon the current statutory provision for RSE within the Northern Ireland Curriculum. The amendments sought to strengthen and clarify the minimum content that must be addressed through existing curriculum arrangements.

All grant-aided schools deliver RSE through curriculum content and associated school policies, supported by Departmental guidance and curriculum resources developed by CCEA.

3. Departmental Implementation Activity

Consultation and stakeholder engagement

The Department [consulted](#) on the circumstances and arrangements which would enable a parent to excuse a pupil from receiving age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion. The consultation ran for twelve weeks between 1 September and 24 November 2023 and was supported by a programme of engagement with key stakeholders, including parents, schools, representative organisations, teachers' unions, school leaders and young people.

The consultation generated significant public interest, with a total of **13,461** responses received. As part of the consultation, the Department engaged directly with young people. The views of young people were also reflected by organisations including NICCY, the Equality Commission, the Children's Law Centre and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission.

The Department published a detailed [Consultation Response Report](#) summarising the outcomes. There was strong support for parental involvement and transparency. 91.72% agreed that parents should be informed about the content of the education being provided, and 95.73% agreed that parents and pupils should have access to their school's RSE policy and planned programme.

The consultation findings subsequently informed the development of Circular 2024/01: Guidance on Amendments to Relationships and Sexuality Education, helping to ensure that implementation arrangements were informed by extensive stakeholder feedback.

Circular 2024/01- Departmental guidance

Following the introduction of the Regulations, the Department issued [Circular 2024/01: Guidance on Amendments to Relationships and Sexuality Education](#), which provided guidance on implementation of the amended statutory requirements relating to sexual and reproductive health and rights, prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion. The Circular clarified curriculum expectations and explained how the amended requirements should be delivered.

The publication of Circular 2024/01 represented the principal mechanism through which the Department translated the requirements of the 2023 Regulations into practical guidance for schools.

The Circular provided clarity on the new statutory curriculum requirements for Key Stages 3 and 4 and set out the Department's expectations regarding the delivery of age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education in these areas.

Circular 2024/01 also provided guidance on parental requests for withdrawal and reinforced existing requirements regarding school RSE policies. In addition, the Department published [information for parents](#), maintained dedicated webpages and [signposted schools to supporting resources](#) and professional learning opportunities.

Circular 2024/01 provided the key link between the legislative requirements introduced by the 2023 Regulations and their practical delivery within schools, ensuring that grant-aided schools were supported in meeting the revised statutory requirements.

Preventative curriculum projects

The Department has also continued to support a wider programme of preventative education aimed at promoting healthy relationships, personal safety, respect, wellbeing and safeguarding. This provides children and young people with opportunities to develop the knowledge, attitudes and behaviours required to form healthy relationships, recognise risk, seek support when needed and make informed decisions. The work also seeks to strengthen practitioner confidence and ensure that schools and youth settings are supported in addressing contemporary issues affecting children and young people.

The Department has continued to develop a continuum of preventative education and workforce support for early years right through to post-primary, in partnership with the Women's Aid Federation of Northern Ireland (WAFNI). This includes programmes which tackle 'keeping yourself safe' and recognising signs of abuse.

The Department also led on a body of work in partnership with Cinemagic which enabled young people to shape and produce films addressing themes including consent, coercive control, online behaviour and harmful attitudes. The work provides both a meaningful youth-voice contribution and potentially useful educational material, subject to agreement on permissions, hosting and supporting guidance.¹

The Department is developing a Healthy Relationships Action Plan and associated deliverables across Early Years, Primary, Post-Primary and Youth. The proposed offer includes a public landing page, age-stage toolkits, practitioner and family information, safeguarding and support pathways, practice-sharing activity and an implementation and review process. The intention is to help education and youth settings manage conversations confidently, recognise concerns and connect children, young people,

¹ [Cinemagic EVAWG film programme](#)

families and staff to the appropriate services when support or escalation is required. This is ultimately a system-coordination exercise: bringing together education, safeguarding, health, justice, youth and voluntary/community provision rather than creating a separate or duplicative system.

As part of Healthy Relationships, officials are working with Dr Susan Lagdon and colleagues at Ulster University to consider how research on coercive control and healthy and unhealthy relationships can inform education, youth, parent/carer and practitioner support. The Head, Shoulders, Knees and Toes work is moving from pilot activity towards rollout planning, while the Healthy Young Adult Relationships research is informing consideration of a digital resource or app through which young people can explore coercive control, relationship behaviours, help-seeking and support.²

4. Evidence available from the Education and Training Inspectorate

The Education and Training Inspectorate (ETI) provides evaluation and inspection services, and its work has included evaluation of the preventative curriculum in schools and Education Other Than at School (EOTAS) settings, including RSE. A [thematic evaluation of the preventative curriculum was published in April 2023](#) and included questionnaire responses from over 14,000 young people. Further relevant evidence is available in a range of recent ETI publications and Insights Reports.

The preventative curriculum

The [ETI work on the preventative curriculum](#) recognises the important role schools play in promoting pupils' health, wellbeing, safety and personal development. The preventative curriculum seeks to equip children and young people with the knowledge, skills and understanding required to make informed decisions, manage risk, develop resilience and maintain positive physical, emotional and social wellbeing.

RSE is recognised as a key element of preventative education, supporting pupils to develop healthy relationships, understand personal safety, make informed choices and access support when needed. Through the preventative curriculum, schools seek

² [Healthy Young Adult Relationships full report | HYAR project overview](#)

to equip children and young people with the knowledge and resilience required to navigate a range of social, emotional and safeguarding challenges.

ETI found that the delivery of the preventative curriculum, including RSE, is inconsistent across schools. It identified gaps in provision, particularly in more sensitive areas such as consent, child sexual exploitation, domestic abuse, sexual abuse and menstrual wellbeing. The report highlighted that 44% of schools and centres teach consent only to a small extent or not at all, despite its importance for safeguarding and healthy relationships. The report also found that pupils want more comprehensive, relevant and age-appropriate learning on these issues.

At that time, ETI also found that teachers may lack the confidence, specialist knowledge and training needed to teach sensitive topics effectively. Nearly three-quarters of schools identified staff confidence as a significant challenge, and many teachers reported insufficient professional learning opportunities.

The report concludes that current curriculum arrangements are not fully meeting the needs of children and young people highlighting the need for a more consistent approach across Northern Ireland, improved teacher training, and better support to ensure all pupils receive high-quality preventative education that equips them to make informed choices and stay safe.

Findings from ETI Insights Reports

The most recent [post-primary Insights Report](#) highlights that schools continue to review aspects of the preventative curriculum, including RSE, in consultation with pupils, parents, governors and other stakeholders.

ETI reports that effective practice is characterised by a coherent and well-structured curriculum where schools audit and map their RSE and Learning for Life and Work provision across areas of learning. This helps to ensure that provision is comprehensive, age and stage appropriate, and responsive to contemporary issues affecting young people.

The report also demonstrates the high priority given by schools to supporting pupil wellbeing. Almost all pupils surveyed indicated that they feel safe in school and that there are adults they can approach if they have concerns or require support. Schools continue to develop approaches that promote wellbeing and ensure that safeguarding arrangements align with statutory requirements.

At the same time, ETI identified areas requiring continued attention. While examples of effective practice were identified, a significant minority of pupils reported that they did not find RSE provision sufficiently helpful. Similarly, parental views indicated varying levels of satisfaction with current provision. These findings suggest that, while schools are continuing to develop their provision, further work may be required to ensure that RSE is consistently delivered.

Emerging evidence of implementation

ETI questionnaires administered in primary and post-primary schools during the 2024-25 and 2025-26 academic years show generally positive and slightly improved perceptions of RSE among parents, teachers and pupils.

In 2025-26, 67.3% of primary parents and 73.9% of post-primary parents surveyed reported that they were content with the RSE provided by their child's school, while only 2.5% of primary parents and 2.1% of post-primary parents reported that they were not content. Teacher confidence also remained high, with 96.7% of primary teachers and 94.5% of post-primary teachers reporting that they had sufficient training and support to deliver the preventative curriculum effectively.

Pupil feedback was similarly positive. In primary schools, 91.0% of pupils reported that they receive helpful information about changes that will happen as they grow up and develop. In post-primary schools, between 71.7% and 80.0% of pupils, depending on year group, reported that they found the RSE provided by their school useful. This compares with a range of 63.1% to 71.6% in 2024-25.

While these findings should be interpreted with appropriate caution, they provide useful evidence that parents, teachers and pupils increasingly view current RSE provision positively.

Curriculum weaknesses

It is critical to note that many of the issues of inconsistency, variation and gaps in core knowledge and entitlement identified by ETI in regard to relationships and sexuality education, are indicative of wider issues with the current Northern Ireland Curriculum.

The current Northern Ireland Curriculum was introduced in 2007. At the time, it represented a significant shift in educational thinking, providing schools with greater flexibility and encouraging a stronger focus on skills, personal development and cross-curricular learning.

Since then, education has changed significantly. Research into learning and curriculum design has developed, societal expectations have evolved and schools have gained almost two decades of experience in implementing the curriculum.

In 2024, the Department, therefore, commissioned an Independent Strategic Review, led by Lucy Crehan, to consider whether the curriculum remained fit for purpose and whether it was providing the best possible educational experience for all children and young people. While the review recognised positive features of the current curriculum, it also identified a number of significant challenges which, taken together, make a strong case for reform.

One of the most significant findings of the review was that the current Northern Ireland curriculum often lacks sufficient clarity regarding what pupils should be taught, know, understand at different stages of their education. The current curriculum provides schools with considerable flexibility. While flexibility can be valuable, it can also create uncertainty. In practice, schools have often interpreted curriculum requirements differently. As a result, pupils of the same age attending different schools may experience very different curriculum content and varying levels of challenge.

This has important implications for consistency across the education system. Where expectations are unclear:

- essential knowledge may be overlooked;
- curriculum coverage can vary considerably between schools;
- teachers can be unsure about priorities.

These are precisely the issues that ETI identified in the delivery of RSE. The curriculum review concluded that schools would benefit from greater clarity regarding the key knowledge, concepts and understanding that all pupils should develop as they progress through education. Consequently, as detailed in Section 6 below, Northern Ireland has been taking forward a significant period of curriculum reform, including in the area of RSE.

Curriculum reform is about building on the strengths of the current Northern Ireland Curriculum while addressing areas where greater clarity, coherence and consistency are needed.

By strengthening progression, identifying essential knowledge more clearly and promoting equity for all learners, the proposed reforms aim to ensure that every child and young person benefits from a high-quality, ambitious and inclusive curriculum that prepares them for lifelong learning, work and active participation in society.

5. CCEA Support and Resources

Throughout this period, CCEA has provided a wide range of resources, guides and support to schools to implement RSE, including the requirements introduced through the [Relationships and Sexuality Education \(Northern Ireland\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023](#).

Support has included a dedicated [RSE Hub](#), curriculum resources, professional learning opportunities and guidance materials designed to assist schools in delivering age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate RSE.

Dedicated RSE Hub

CCEA launched its dedicated [RSE Hub](#) in 2019 and subsequently enhanced the available resources in 2024 to align with the revised statutory requirements. The Hub provides schools with curriculum guidance, teaching resources, case studies, professional learning materials and information on a wide range of RSE topics.

Between September 2024 and August 2026, the RSE Hub recorded over 23,400 page views across its various sections and almost 12,000 user sessions. The main RSE landing page received more than 7,300 views, indicating strong interest in resources supporting the delivery of sensitive and contemporary issues.

The [Northern Ireland Assembly Education Committee's Inquiry](#) into RSE noted that the Hub contains comprehensive resources, reflects current issues affecting young people and provides schools with guidance on using materials in a manner consistent with school ethos and policies. The Committee subsequently commended the Hub to schools, parents and pupils.

Curriculum resources

CCEA has developed a broad suite of curriculum-linked resources that support learning across all key stages and post-16 provision. These resources cover a wide range of topics including:

- consent;
- healthy, positive sexual expression and relationships;
- internet safety;
- social media and self-esteem;
- menstrual wellbeing;
- LGBTQ+ matters;
- domestic and sexual violence and abuse;
- sexual and reproductive health and rights; and
- special educational needs (SEN) considerations.

The resources are designed to support schools in addressing contemporary issues affecting children and young people.

The Education Committee noted that the materials include content on issues such as online safety, upskirting, down-blousing and healthy relationships, and that they can be adapted to meet the needs, age and maturity of pupils.

In addition to curriculum resources, CCEA has published case studies highlighting effective practice and practical approaches adopted by schools when planning and delivering RSE.

Relationships and Sexuality Education progression framework

A key element of CCEA's support is the RSE Framework, which provides a non-statutory progression pathway from Foundation Stage through to post-16 education. The framework supports schools in planning coherent and cumulative learning experiences and helps ensure that content is age-appropriate, inclusive and evidence-based.

The Education Committee found that the framework provides comprehensive progression in learning and can be tailored to the age and maturity of individual pupils.

The framework reflects diverse family structures and address's themes including human rights, gender equality, wellbeing, relationships and safeguarding.

The framework is informed by recognised national and international evidence-based approaches, including UNESCO's International Technical Guidance on Sexuality Education, the UK Council for Internet Safety's *Education for a Connected World* framework, and the PSHE Association Programme of Study.

Professional learning and practitioner support

CCEA supports practitioners across the education system through a programme of webinars and engagement activities designed to increase confidence in delivering

RSE and to raise awareness of new resources and legislative developments. These events have been well attended, with webinars frequently attracting over 100 participants from across the education sector.

The [RSE Hub](#) contains a dedicated Training and Professional Development section which signposts teachers, school leaders, governors and parents to organisations providing specialist training and support. The section also provides access to professional learning materials and related guidance.

Further to the above, in March 2026, CCEA, supported by the Domestic and Sexual Abuse Strategy Programme Fund and government partners including DE, delivered a [major symposium](#) focusing on domestic and sexual abuse and Ending Violence Against Women and Girls (EVAWG). The event brought together over 100 delegates, including representatives from 49 schools, and provided practical guidance to strengthen delivery of RSE and the wider preventative curriculum. Evaluation evidence indicated increased awareness of support services and strengthened confidence among participants in addressing these issues within school settings.

Support materials on sexual and reproductive health and rights

To support implementation of the 2023 Regulations, CCEA developed dedicated [resources addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights](#) (SRHR). These materials support schools in meeting the statutory requirement to provide age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights.

The SRHR section of the RSE Hub includes resources covering:

- period dignity and menstrual wellbeing;
- prevention of early pregnancy;
- developments in contraception;
- teen parenting;
- abortion;
- sexually transmitted infections; and

- HIV and AIDS.

The resources provide guidance on the legally required content schools should address. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission has assessed implementation of the relevant CEDAW recommendation as demonstrating effective implementation and has acknowledged that resources within the RSE Hub support delivery of the required curriculum content.

Together, these resources, professional learning opportunities and support materials provide a strong and comprehensive support framework to help schools deliver high-quality RSE and meet their statutory responsibilities under the 2023 Regulations.

6. Curriculum Reform and future developments

Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028

As highlighted above, as part of TransformED NI, a new [Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028](#) has been proposed. The draft curriculum places greater emphasis on clearly well-defined progression, conceptual understanding and coherent curriculum pathways across all phases of education. The proposed reforms aim to ensure that learning builds systematically from Foundation Stage through to post-primary education.

The curriculum reform programme has been informed by the findings of the Strategic Review of the Northern Ireland Curriculum. Evidence gathered through stakeholder engagement and a survey of over 1,400 teachers highlighted widespread concerns regarding curriculum coherence, progression and implementation support. Teachers reported a lack of clarity regarding what pupils should know and be able to do at different stages of education, concerns regarding curriculum overload, insufficient curriculum-related professional learning and excessive reliance on locally produced resources.

These findings informed the development of Curriculum 2028 and its stronger emphasis on progression, curriculum coherence and implementation support.

The review also specifically highlighted growing demands associated with safeguarding, wellbeing and RSE, with teachers identifying a need for a more coherent curriculum structure.

Introduction of Personal, Social, Civic and Careers (PSCC)

A significant feature of the proposed curriculum is the introduction of [Personal, Social, Civic and Careers \(PSCC\)](#) as a distinct subject across all stages of compulsory education from Year 1 to Year 12 and encompassing relationships and sexuality education.

The proposed new framework responds directly to evidence that aspects of the current curriculum structure do not always provide sufficient progression or clarity.

The PSCC framework establishes a clearer progression model, specifies key knowledge and concepts more explicitly and provides a stronger curriculum entitlement for all learners. The framework includes and integrates the key areas required under the 2023 Regulations, including consent, sexual and reproductive health and prevention of early pregnancy, within a broader programme focused on personal development, relationships, wellbeing and responsible decision-making. This approach provides clarity (for teachers, pupils and parents) on what should be taught and when, and how this learning progresses and builds over time.

PSCC also contributes directly to the development of [Curriculum 2028 capabilities](#), particularly communication, self-management, civic contribution, reasoning and ethical understanding.

Consultation status

The PSCC framework has been published as part of the [Northern Ireland Curriculum 2028 public consultation](#). The draft document makes clear that it is being issued for

consultation and forms part of a wider suite of curriculum reform proposals. Responses received through the consultation process will inform final decisions on curriculum content, implementation arrangements and supporting materials before any revised curriculum is introduced.

Implementation will be supported by phased resource development, professional learning, implementation guidance and curriculum exemplification, intended to improve consistency and reduce workload for teachers.

Implications for RSE

The proposed PSCC framework represents a significant development in the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) within the Northern Ireland Curriculum. By replacing separate PDMU and LLW arrangements with a single framework spanning Foundation Stage to Key Stage 3, it is intended to provide greater coherence, clearer progression and a stronger curriculum entitlement for all learners.

The framework embeds RSE within a broader and more specific programme of personal development, relationships, health and wellbeing, with a stronger focus on healthy relationships, consent, personal safety and informed decision-making.

The Department is also mindful that the 2023 Regulations requires that pupils receive age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights. The Department has ensured that Curriculum 2028 content is grounded in established scientific knowledge and evidence. This approach is reflected in the [draft Science framework](#), which promotes scientific enquiry, human biology, reproduction, health and disease, and the evaluation of scientific claims.

Curriculum 2028 also strengthens safeguarding through an increased emphasis on contemporary issues affecting children and young people, including online safety, exploitation, abusive relationships and digital behaviours, helping to ensure that learning remains relevant, evidence-informed and responsive to the challenges young people face in modern society.

Key enhancements within the draft PSCC Framework

The proposed curriculum includes explicit legal learning entitlements for all pupils relating to:

- healthy relationships, consent and personal boundaries;
- personal safety and safeguarding, including online safety, exploitation and abusive behaviours;
- emotional wellbeing, resilience and help-seeking behaviours that support healthy decision-making;
- puberty, human development and sexual and reproductive health;
- prevention of early pregnancy and understanding the role of contraception;
- understanding the legal framework relating to sexual activity, including age of consent;
- understanding that abortion is a legal medical procedure in Northern Ireland and that reliable information is available through health services; and developing the knowledge and understanding required to make informed, responsible and age-appropriate decisions about relationships and sexual health.

Collectively, these proposals would provide a more comprehensive, structured and specific framework for RSE, strengthening alignment with contemporary safeguarding and wellbeing priorities while supporting delivery of the statutory requirements introduced through the [Relationships and Sexuality Education \(Northern Ireland\) \(Amendment\) Regulations 2023](#). This approach is critical to supporting greater consistency in delivery, and a more specific and detailed core minimum content for RSE, which will be an entitlement for every pupil in Northern Ireland.

The draft PSCC framework therefore represents a positive opportunity to further strengthen RSE provision through a more explicit, progressive and evidence informed approach.

Supporting effective curriculum change

Implementation of the new curriculum, including the PSCC framework, will be underpinned by a number of important principles including:

- **Professional learning will sit at the centre of the implementation process.**

The new curriculum places greater emphasis on clearly specified knowledge, progression and subject coherence. Consequently, teachers will require opportunities to engage with subject content including the new PSCC framework, curriculum design and evidence-informed approaches to teaching and learning. This professional learning will be available through a combination of face-to-face and online opportunities.

- **There will be significant investment in curriculum-aligned resources.**

These will include curriculum maps, unit plans, progression frameworks, lesson materials and exemplification resources designed to help schools translate statutory requirements into coherent classroom practice. International evidence suggests that high-quality shared resources can support consistency, improve implementation and reduce unnecessary workload for teachers.

7. Conclusion

Overall, the Department has taken substantial and sustained action to implement the requirements of the Relationships and Sexuality Education (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023. This has included extensive stakeholder engagement and consultation, the publication of detailed guidance and significant investment in support for schools through CCEA.

Schools have access to a wide range of curriculum resources, professional learning opportunities and specialist support through the CCEA RSE Hub, including materials specifically addressing sexual and reproductive health and rights, prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.

Evidence from ETI indicates that RSE is being delivered across schools and that perceptions among pupils, parents and teachers are generally improving. ETI inspection and evaluation activity also provides an important mechanism for monitoring the quality and effectiveness of RSE provision.

However, ETI has identified continuing variation in delivery between schools and gaps in coverage of some important topics. The evidence suggests that these issues are not unique to RSE but reflect wider structural weaknesses within the current Northern Ireland Curriculum, which provides limited specificity about the important knowledge and content that all pupils should receive. It is important to appreciate that there are limitations to the consistency of provision that can be provided within the current high-level statutory curriculum framework.

The Department is addressing these issues directly through the Curriculum 2028 reform programme. The proposed statutory PSCC framework will provide significantly greater clarity, progression and consistency in the delivery of RSE and related learning, including explicit coverage of key content, including that required under the 2023 Regulations and beyond. Importantly, this will establish a stronger and more consistent entitlement for all pupils across grant-aided schools.

Implementation of the reformed curriculum will be supported by comprehensive subject-specific professional learning, new curriculum guidance and exemplification, and significant investment in resources, including dedicated support for PSCC to be procured during the 2026-27 academic year. This will be complemented by a new curriculum resources hub, helping to strengthen teacher confidence, improve consistency of delivery and ensure that children and young people continue to receive high-quality, age-appropriate and scientifically accurate RSE. These are important developments for RSE and curriculum reform is fundamental to the continued improvement of and support for delivery of RSE across the education system.

Taken together, the evidence demonstrates clear progress in implementing the Regulations, while also highlighting how ongoing curriculum reform provides the longer-term route to ensuring consistent, high-quality RSE provision for all learners.

