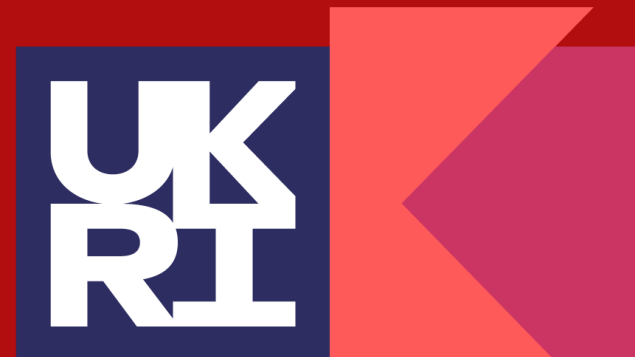


“We are all educating our children” – Parent/carer perspectives on RSE in primary schools

Cait Jobson
August 2023



**Economic
and Social
Research Council**



What did we do?

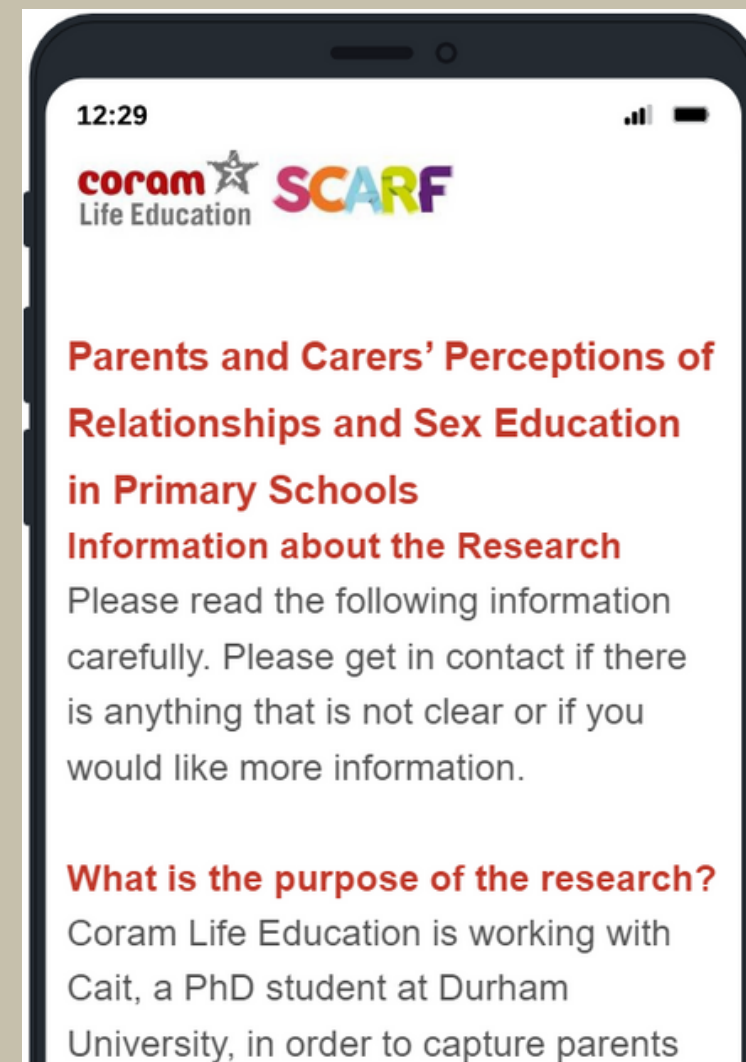
Demographics

Not all respondents provided demographical data. However, most identified as women (93.2%), were from white ethnic groups (79.5%), and lived in the North East of England (31.8%), South East of England (20.5%) or London (27.3%)



In July 2023, Coram Life Education worked with Cait, a PhD student at Durham University to understand parents'/carers' perspectives towards primary school RSE.

Through an online Survey of 71 parents and carers whose child attends a primary school which works with Coram's SCARF programme.



The small sample size of the research is not representative of all primary school parents/carers but does indicate consistent views and further insights for parent/carer engagement in primary school RSE.

What did we know already?



Young People Experiences of RSE... have often been referred to as 'too little, too late and too biological' (Blake & Aggleto, 2017). Young people recognise that their RSE needs are unmet and feel they could deal with more challenging content (Ofsted, 2021).

Parents/carers see RSE as important... to keep primary school children safe (Robinson et al., 2017). Although there is a vocal minority who have concerns about what and how RSE is being taught, parents and carers generally want their children to have good knowledge about relationships and sex (ibid).

Prominent narratives surround RSE such as whether RSE is age-appropriate, safeguarding and certain topics sensitive. It is often this same 'protection' from exposure to 'sensitive topics' which can lead to misinformation and increased vulnerability due to the lack of factual information (Robinson, 2012).

A collaborative joined-up approach between schools and parents/carers can lead to greater clarity and coherence between the schools' and parents'/carers' messages to children.

What did we find out?



Parents/carers see RSE as important for children's well-being and safety.

"I think this subject should be covered at any age when it comes up. Children deserve correct information and it is essential for safeguarding as well as creating informed teens and adults."

Only 22% disagreed signalling that their child is "too young". While some were unsure (21%), the majority of parents/carers (57%) agreed that RSE in primary school is beneficial to their child.

What did we find out?



77% indicated a joined-up collaborative approach between parent/carers and schools is important to ensure children are taught accurate and appropriate information and skills regarding relationships and sex.

"We are all educating our children."

A selection of trusted adults to talk to about these issues reinforces shared messages surrounding RSE both at school and at home, and provides children with the knowledge of to whom they could disclose abuse.

What did we find out?



Prominent narratives are nuanced and with multiple interpretations. Few parents emphasised protecting childhood innocence, while others highlighted the need for timely and accurate information to safeguard children.

Age-appropriate:

"I don't want them telling too much too soon. Let them be children."

Safeguarding:

"It could prevent possible abuse."

RSE should provide "the right information at the most appropriate age."

Sensitive topics:

"Delivered in a factual non-judgemental way covering all people/genders/sexualities in an age-appropriate way."

"I think introducing subjects like different sexual orientation[s] or transgender issues at that young age is unnecessary[...]"

What did we find out?



Lack of clarity on what is actually being taught

prompted many of parents'/carers' misconceptions and fears surrounding RSE.

Only 44% of parents/carers knew what is being taught in primary school RSE. The majority (64%) had not heard of primary schools teaching inappropriate topics. Most concerns were regarding topics that are not included in the RSE curriculum and would not be taught in primary schools.

Most heard about inappropriate content from social media and other parents/carers, not from their own direct experiences or school.

"No need to sexualise children, children do not need to know about types of sex, sex games and fetishes."

Better communication between schools and parents/carers could counteract these inaccurate perceptions.

What did we find out?



Most parents/carers were neither satisfied nor dissatisfied with the engagement from school around RSE. Engagement methods that were appreciated:

- Emails
- Newsletters
- Meetings and workshops

Parents/carers wished to be more engaged but had limited time and ability to do so with current methods.

91%
of parents/carers had never had a reason to contact the school about RSE-related issues.

82% of parents/carers felt equipped to talk to about RSE at home but **desired more consistent and ongoing communication** to ensure joined-up conversations with their children both at school and at home.

Conclusions and Recommendations

What could be done?



Diverse engagement methods such as:

- Dedicated meetings
- One-to-one sessions
- RSE stand at parents' evening
- Questionnaires/surveys
- Focus groups
- School website
- Social Media accounts
- Monthly newsletter
- Termly letter

to encourage engagement from all parents/carers.

Parents/carers requested additional information by

printed materials and information sheets which cover:

- What will be taught and when
- More detail about content
- Language and vocabulary used in the classroom
- Summaries of discussions that arise during lessons

These need to be on an ongoing and frequent basis, both prior to and after teaching RSE lessons; not just a one-off.

Conclusions and Recommendations

What could be done?



Tackling narratives through improved engagement:

- Age appropriateness, safeguarding and sensitive topics are discussed by parents/carers across a spectrum of perspectives on primary school RSE.
- Through discussions backed up by research and evidence, misconceptions and inaccurate information can be debunked.

Instead of viewing these narratives as opposing, we should **recognise shared goals and work together to safeguard children.**

"We are all educating our children."

Conclusions and Recommendations

What could be done?



Listening to children and young people...

- Children's views should be fed into RSE planning
- As requested by respondents, their thoughts and questions could be shared anonymously with parents.

Adults need to recognise children's capacity to understand, and strengthen their skills to ask for what they need from their RSE **not pursue protection at the expense of meaningful and inclusive participation.**

In summary:
if children are brave enough to ask, adults should be brave enough to answer.

coram 
Life Education