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Rt Hon Justine Greening MP
Secretary of State

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Rt Hon George Howarth MP
By email: jonathan.woods@parliament.uk

10 October 2016

Dear George,

Thank you for your email of 4 October, on behalf of several of your constituents and enclosing sample correspondence, about sex and relationships education (SRE).

SRE is already compulsory in all maintained secondary schools, with many primary schools also choosing to teach it. SRE may also be taught as part of personal, social, health and economic education (PSHE). Additionally, aspects of the biology of reproduction and the human life cycle are included in the national curriculum for science at key stage 3. In the introduction to the new national curriculum, we have reminded schools of their legal responsibility to teach SRE. The Government remains clear that age-appropriate SRE is essential for pupils' development and preparation for responsible adult life.

When any school teaches SRE, they must have regard to the official guidance, which is available at: tinyurl.com/qevhlvw. This states that all SRE should be age-appropriate and that schools should ensure young people develop positive values and a moral framework that will guide their decisions, judgments and behaviour. This is particularly relevant to sexual consent, and the guidance also states that all young people should understand how the law applies to sexual relationships. The guidance covers the importance of marriage, loving and stable relationships, consent and how to avoid exploitation and abuse.

The Government firmly believes in the importance of high-quality teaching on this topic, and encourages teachers to draw on reliable and well informed sources of advice and support, such as the PSHE Association and the Sex Education Forum.

We continue to work with schools and experts to ensure that SRE is appropriate and of a high standard. We have already set up a new expert subject group on PSHE to identify key areas where teachers need further support. We continue to look at ways to support schools to improve the quality of SRE teaching.

During the education select committee session on 14 September, the issue of making personal, social, health and economic (PSHE) education statutory was raised. I told the committee that I am looking at the issue but have not yet reached a formal view. I do, however, absolutely recognise the importance of a high-quality PSHE education.

I would like to reassure your constituents that we will continue to keep the status of PSHE education under review, and identify further actions we can take to ensure that all pupils receive high quality, age appropriate PSHE education and SRE.

Thank you for writing on this important matter.

Best Wishes,

Julie

RT HON JUSTINE GREENING MP