



Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards

Sanctuary Buildings, 20 Great Smith Street, Westminster, London, SW1P 3BT
tel: 0370 000 2288 www.education.gov.uk/help/contactus

Jesse Norman MP
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

Your ref: JN15694/AS

7 June 2021

Dear Jesse,

Thank you for your letter of 23 March 2021, regarding the Relationships, Sex and Health Education (RSHE) resource "A Fertile Heart". I am sorry for the delay in responding to you, it has taken some time to gather the facts surrounding this issue.

"A Fertile Heart" was previously mandated by the Archdiocese of Cardiff for use in its schools, though we understand that is no longer the case and schools in the Archdiocese now have a choice of resources, including *A Fertile Heart*. As you say in your letter, the department has been made aware of the concerns about this resource previously. Generally, the department does not comment on externally produced resources, as it is for schools to make their own decisions about the best teaching resources to support their pupils. However, I am concerned that "A Fertile Heart" contains content that would be hard for a school to present in a school setting in a way that is consistent with the [RSHE statutory guidance](#).

The statutory guidance is clear that, by the end of their education, pupils should be taught how stereotypes can cause damage - for example, the risk that gender stereotypes could normalise non-consensual behaviour or encourage prejudice. In this light, I have serious concerns about the gender stereotypes contained within "A Fertile Heart", including the suggestion that the role of men in sexual relationships is to be "directing" or to "initiate" love, while the role of women is to "receive" love.

Schools should also take care to avoid any material which is inaccurate, or which uses factual evidence selectively to support a particular view. I am concerned that "A Fertile Heart" includes information about the effect of contraception on girls which is inaccurate and appears to be included to alarm pupils.

Organisations that publish resources for schools independently are not subject to the public sector equality duty or Human Rights legislation, and the department has no powers to withdraw such material from circulation or direct that it is amended. However, given our concerns about sexual violence against girls in schools and our increasing awareness of the way in which the school culture can contribute to this serious problem, I will write to the publishers of "A Fertile Heart", and to the Archbishop of Cardiff to set out my serious concerns.

I will also raise the point that, although schools designated with a religious character are free to teach religious education (RE) and conduct collective worship according to the tenets of their faith, where RE is delivered in conjunction with RSHE, they are expected to deliver the new RSHE curriculum and should ensure the content is differentiated for pupils so that it is clear where they are being taught content that reflects religious belief. This is particularly important where pupils are taught about topics, such as contraception and same sex relationships, where religious belief may not align with aspects of the curriculum. The Catholic Education Service (CES) has produced [a range of materials](#) to help Catholic schools develop high quality RSHE that balances the requirements of the curriculum with the tenets of their faith. I will reference the CES's materials as a helpful resource in my letter to the publisher.

I have asked officials to continue to work with the CES and the Welsh Office to monitor the situation. So far, we believe that the only secondary school in England to have used "A Fertile Heart" is St Mary's Roman Catholic High School. On 20 April, following similar complaints to those which you raise in your letter, Ofsted undertook a Section 8 inspection of St Mary's and found that the school uses and adapts a variety of resources to suit pupils' needs as part of their RSE curriculum. Ofsted found that the way leaders intend to implement the RSE programme will not promote misogynistic or discriminatory attitudes, nor will it endorse messages that are contrary to the Equality Act 2010. A link to the published report can be found here: [50164024 \(ofsted.gov.uk\)](#).

With best wishes.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nick', is positioned above the typed name and title.

Rt Hon Nick Gibb MP
Minister of State for School Standards