

Systemic guidance, help and support? It was non-existent: Teachers experiences of delivering relationships and sex education for children and young people with learning difficulties.

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Abstract

In 2020, England implemented a significant legislative change, making Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) compulsory for all schools, including specialist provisions (Department for Education (DfE), 2019). Before this, the provision of RSE for Children and Young People with Learning Disabilities (CYPwLD) was inconsistent and often questioned (Office for Standards in Education Children's Services and Skills, 2013), with outdated harmful stigmatisation and discrimination creating barriers in access to meaningful and appropriate RSE (Brown, 1994; Young et al., 2012). This legislative shift has signified a move towards supporting the rights of CYPwLD to go on to develop happy and healthy intimate relationships. However, research has not yet investigated how teachers in special schools have navigated its implementation. Thus, this research aims to explore how secondary school teachers are experiencing the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD in light of this legislative change.

Individual unstructured interviews were conducted with four secondary special school teachers who had been involved in the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD. The data was subsequently analysed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis revealing five Group Experiential Themes: RSE is vital, implementing ambiguous guidance, carrying emotional loads, seeking support in solitude, and working with diverse minds.

This research offers valuable insights into teachers' experiences in delivering RSE for CYPwLD. It sheds light on the current challenges and identifies areas where additional support is needed to ensure best practice in RSE for CYPwLD. These

findings have implications for a range of stakeholders including policymakers, Educational Psychologists, healthcare professionals, local authorities and education settings.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

1.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter provides an exploration of the national context surrounding the provision of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) for children and young people with learning difficulties (CYPwLDs) in England. It delves into historical perspectives on disability paradigms and discusses the evolving use of terminology. Additionally, the chapter examines the implementation of RSE within the national curriculum, outlining its historical development and recent reforms. It highlights the importance of inclusive RSE for individuals with learning difficulties (LDs), considering perspectives from individuals, families, and teachers.

1.2. Definitions and Rationale for the Presented Terminology

Throughout history, a variety of terms have been adopted in an attempt to define the needs of people with LDs, which have evolved in line with societal changes and increased understanding. Many of these historical terms are now understood to be offensive and derogatory, and as such will be avoided where possible throughout this thesis. In 1985, self-advocacy groups began pushing for legislative changes in terminology, adopting the term 'people with learning difficulties' (People First, 2023) which legislation only began to address in 1990, with the term 'people with learning disabilities' adopted following the NHS and Community Care Act (1990). In 2001, the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) officially defined a 'learning disability' as "a significantly reduced ability to understand new or complex information, to learn

new skills (impaired intelligence), with a reduced ability to cope independently (impaired social functioning), which started before adulthood” (Department of Health (DoH), 2001, p. 14).

Terminology and definitions have been further considered and adapted, with the World Health Organisation’s (WHO) most recent ICD-11 (WHO, 2019) using the term ‘Disorder of Intellectual Development’, which is defined as follows:

A group of etiologically diverse conditions originating during the developmental period characterised by significantly below average intellectual functioning and adaptive behaviour that are approximately two or more standard deviations below the mean [otherwise using] clinical judgment based on appropriate assessment of comparable behavioural indicators (WHO, 2019).

The ICD-11 has further expanded on this, including a continuum or spectrum of subcategories ranging across mild, moderate, severe and profound, aiming to accommodate for the variety of complex needs an individual with a LD may have (WHO, 2019).

In line with this, The Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND) Code of Practice (2015) describes LDs as covering:

A wide range of needs, including moderate learning difficulties (MLD), severe learning difficulties (SLD), where children are likely to need support in all areas of the curriculum and associated difficulties with mobility and communication, through to profound and multiple learning difficulties (PMLD),

where children are likely to have severe and complex learning difficulties as well as a physical disability or sensory impairment” (DfE, 2015, pp. 97-98).

Whilst a range of terms have been used when referring to individuals with the previously outlined presenting needs, with current diagnostic criteria and legislation using terms such as ‘learning disability’ or ‘intellectual disability’, for example, there is limited consensus as to whether this reflects appropriate use of language.

Advocacy groups such as ‘People First’ continue to promote the term ‘learning difficulty’ as preferable due to negative connotations and misunderstandings around the nature of these individuals’ difficulties as *disabling*. This terminology further reflects the notion that learning support should be adaptable and subject to revision to accommodate the evolving needs and progress of the individuals at the centre (Hardie & Tilly, 2012). In consideration of the above, this thesis will therefore adopt the term ‘learning difficulty’ (LD) in reference to individuals with the described needs.

Additionally, the term ‘neurodiversity’ will also be used when considering individual differences in thinking and cognitive processing. Baumer & Frueh (2021) define “neurodiversity as the idea that people experience and interact with the world around them in many different ways; there is no one "right" way of thinking, learning, and behaving, and differences are not viewed as deficits”. Thus, in adopting this terminology, this thesis aims to reflect the understanding that there is no singular or ‘correct’ way of thinking. Instead, it recognises and celebrates diversity in cognitive processing and perspectives.

1.3. Relationship and Sex Education (RSE) in England

The implementation of RSE programmes within England became part of the national curriculum as part of the Education Act (1993). However, their implementation remained questionable, with schools upholding a legal obligation only to cover a limited RSE related curriculum primarily covering the scientific components of puberty and reproduction (British Humanist Association, 2017). The limited policy, structure and guidance in place at the time created inconsistent approaches between schools, with some provisions opting to provide comprehensive curriculums whilst others remained only within their legal obligation (Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted), 2013). These inconsistencies have created widespread controversy about how and what should be taught about sex and relationships in school (Cook, 2012), with recent research finding that insufficient teaching has left pupils feeling vulnerable, unsafe, and excluded in the context of LGBTQ+ pupils and pupils with SEND (Abbott et al., 2021; Brown, 2019; Epps et al., 2023).

In 2017 the government addressed these concerns, acknowledging that the guidance in place at the time was 'increasingly outdated' and beginning a much needed reform of RSE, emphasising the importance of teaching pupils about health and wellbeing within relationships as well as sex (DfE, 2017; Greening, 2017). These plans were shortly presented to parliament who enacted the Children and Social Work Act (Her Majesty's Stationery Office (HMSO), 2017), officially securing all children and young people's (CYPs) right to receive RSE teaching by law. In order to uphold this right, the Department for Education (DfE, 2019) further provided statutory guidance on the mandatory delivery of RSE for all schools in England, coming into

place in September 2020. As a result, in England today, all primary schools are required by law to teach Relationships Education and all secondary schools are required to teach RSE (DfE, 2019).

The purpose of RSE is not only centred around improving sexual health through reducing the likelihood of disease or negative experience, but also highlights positive aspects of sexuality, such as supporting “pleasurable and safe sexual experiences” (World Health Organisation, 2006, p. 5). In line with this, RSE programmes should not only aim to prevent the risks associated with sex, such as sexually transmitted infections (STI’s) and unplanned pregnancies, but should also be centred around supporting individuals to be sexually active in a safe, comfortable and positive way.

However, for people with learning difficulties (PwLD), the issue of appropriate RSE has become a growing concern. In 2000, guidance was provided by the Department for Education and Employment (DfEE, 2000), which emphasised the responsibility of all schools to ensure that children and young people with SEND are included within RSE programmes. However, the guidance specifically relating to supporting CYP with SEND was broad. While overarching topics and strategies were suggested, they were primarily related mainstream to education settings, lacking specific guidance on how to adapt and effectively implement RSE effectively for CYP with SEND. Thus, the responsibility for the implementation of such programmes remained upon individual schools, departments and teachers. Subsequent research has indicated gaps in PwLD’s understanding of sex and relationships in reported confusion around RSE topics such as masturbation, intercourse and STIs, with no report on participants’ understanding of the positive, emotional elements of sexual

relationships (Lafferty et al., 2012). Thus, bringing the RSE provision for CYPwLD within educational settings into question.

Furthermore, many CYP additionally develop their understanding of sexual knowledge informally through friendships and social networks (Jahoda & Pownall, 2014). However, CYPwLD are more likely to experience peer victimisation and social isolation meaning that these opportunities may be reduced when compared to the general population (Baines et al., 2018). Additionally, Jahoda and Pownall (2014) found that CYPwLD were more likely to hold misconceptions about sex and relationships. For example, some individuals held the belief that you are unable to fall pregnant the first time you have sexual intercourse. Addressing these misconceptions can be challenging without the support of effective formal RSE and/or discussions with trusted adults.

Legislation has aimed to improve this, with Valuing People White Paper (Department of Health, 2001) and Valuing People Now (Department of Health, 2009) discussing the matter, yet continues to remain broad in nature. The recent statutory guidance (DfE, 2019) further emphasises the requirements for *all* schools (e.g. pupil referral units, special academies, maintained special schools, and non-maintained special school) to provide an RSE curriculum. Yet, guidance on the structure of teaching remains broad, stating that for CYP with SEND, RSE should be accessible with “high quality teaching that is differentiated and personalised will be the starting point to ensure accessibility” (DfE, 2019, p. 15), with consideration that “some pupils are more vulnerable to exploitation, bullying and other issues due to the nature of their SEND” (DfE, 2019, p. 15), and emphasis on a “...need to tailor content and teaching

to meet the specific needs of pupils at different developmental stages...” (DfE, 2019, p. 15). While the provided guidance undoubtedly addresses points of key importance, these points undeniably form the cornerstone of teaching CYP with SEND across most areas.

Consequently, it can be argued that this guidance mainly reiterates recommendations that educators in special schools are likely already integrating within their daily practice. In the context of a complex subject such as RSE, broad guidance such as this leaves many teachers grappling with unresolved questions. Therefore, although the needs of CYPwLD in relation to RSE have been recognised, the development of a clear and suitable educational structure in England remains to be seen, with further questions raised as to how this guidance has been implemented across provisions.

1.4. Exploring Disability Paradigms: Medical vs. Social Models

When exploring issues surrounding the idea of disability, we engage with a complex and ongoing discussion that goes beyond medical diagnoses and functional limitations. It is a dialogue about how we, as a society, perceive and respond to the diverse experiences of individuals who live with disabilities. To truly understand this discourse, it is important to explore two distinct models: the medical model (Laing, 1998) and the social model of disability (Mitra, 2006). These models serve as lenses through which we view disability, shaping the way we think, talk, and, most importantly, how we support the needs of those at the centre of such labels.

Within the medical model of disability (Laing, 1998), disability is considered a phenomenon situated within the individual, resulting from impairment of bodily structure or function (Forhan, 2009). As such, the model takes the view that individuals with a disability are unable to function as a 'typical' individual may do (Roush & Sharby, 2011), with the resulting approach centred around prevention, treatment and care (Brandon & Pritchard, 2011). Thus, with a focus on the individual, the model provides a strong emphasis on diagnostic labels and definitions to provide effective treatment and care. The model has been dominant throughout recent history, which may be reflective of the ongoing disparities between how systems have chosen to label and define such needs when compared to the views of those they seek to define, as previously discussed.

However, the model has been heavily criticised for leading people with disabilities to feel left out, unappreciated, and pressured to conform to a questionable norm, or as if they're universally incapable (Smith, 2008). For example, individuals with disabilities share experiences of frustration when they encounter pity or disbelief when discussing the positive aspects of their lives while living with their conditions (Wendell, 1996). Furthermore, it has been argued that there is limited consideration as to the influence of professionals and uniqueness of the individual (Haegele & Hodge, 2016). This may be problematic in that support based upon allocation of labels and definitions based on impairments may devalue the individuality of individuals with a disability, potentially disregarding their own beliefs, values and wants for their own care (Haegele & Hodge, 2016).

On the other hand, the social model of disability (Mitra, 2006) has increased in popularity within recent years, suggesting that the idea of disability is imposed on individuals with impairments. Rather, the idea of impairment and disability are distinguished: an impairment is characterised as an 'abnormality' within the body, whilst disability is considered as the disadvantage an individual is faced with due to issues within society, arising from lack of consideration of such impairments and subsequent exclusion (Goodley, 2001). Thus, shifting the narrative from an issue situated within the individual to an issue within society. However, the model too has been criticised, with Palmer and Harley (2012) pointing out that the model fails to recognise the reality of an impairment and the impact of such upon an individual's lived experience.

Although the model does not come without limitations, the approach encourages us to perceive disability not as a one-size-fits-all, static condition, but as a dynamic, diverse experience that interacts with the social, cultural, and individual aspects of our lives. By acknowledging the voices of individuals with disabilities and engaging with their individuality, we can move beyond labels. Instead, we empower ourselves to appreciate the unique journey each person with a disability undertakes, advocating for a more inclusive society. In doing so, we pave the way for substantial positive changes, ultimately creating a world where everyone can thrive, regardless of difference.

1.5. Unravelling the Consequences: Inadequate RSE and its Effects on Equality, Health, and Wellbeing for PwLD

PwLD have been subject to inequality, discrimination and harmful stigmatisation throughout history. In the 1900s, the idea that PwLD may actually have a desire to

engage in positive, healthy sexual relationships was hardly recognised (Brown, 1994). PwLD have been portrayed as a physical threat to society, with pervasive beliefs that they were incapable of controlling their sexual desires (Kerr & Shakespeare, 2007). Surprisingly, it was later suggested that these beliefs still lingered, particularly regarding men with LD, who are often wrongly perceived as unable to manage their sexual impulses (Young et al., 2012). While there have been some legislative changes aimed at promoting equality in the context of sex and relationships (DfE, 2019; DoH, 2001; DoH, 2009), the journey toward full equality remains ongoing, and the necessity for substantial change is evident. PwLD, like everyone else, have a fundamental right to experience happy and healthy romantic relationships.

Although sexual rights are not explicitly discussed within the UK Human Rights Act (1998), the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) does reflect this, asserting that people with disabilities have a right to good sexual healthcare and must not be discriminated against in areas including marriage and relationships. To address these rights, it is crucial that PwLD have equal access to effective, appropriate, and meaningful RSE while in school. This will ensure that PwLD are not left behind their peers, and leave school equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to build fulfilling and healthy intimate relationships.

The impact of such inequalities has had unprecedented effects on PwLD's health and overall wellbeing. Extensive literature indicates that PwLD encounter a higher prevalence of issues related to sex and relationships. For example, studies have uncovered gaps in PwLD's understanding of body parts and physical characteristics

such as internal and external sexual organs (Healy et al., 2009), sexual intercourse, contraception/STIs, pregnancy (Jahoda & Pownall, 2014), and masturbation (Lafferty et al., 2012), placing them at greater risk of sexually related health issues and also at greater vulnerability to abuse or otherwise negative and unsafe sexual experiences than the general population (Baines et al., 2018). Regrettably, this also means that PwLD are more likely to report instances of sexual abuse compared to those without a LD (McDaniels & Fleming, 2016; Peckham, 2007).

Additionally, when it comes to the emotional and relational wellbeing of PwLD, research has revealed the positive impact of being able to develop healthy romantic relationships on overall mental wellbeing, developing a sense of support and emotional security whilst enhancing self-esteem (Rushbrooke et al., 2014). It is essential that we shift away from outdated beliefs and recognise that many PwLDs do indeed desire loving relationships, highlighting aspirations of long-term commitments like cohabitation, marriage, and the prospect of having children (Bates et al., 2017; Healy et al., 2009). Insufficient RSE means that PwLD face greater challenges in finding companionship, needing a higher level of support in understanding the complex dynamics at play within romantic relationships. Moreover, conservative views from caregivers and professionals have created further barriers not only to access RSE, but also in allowing opportunities for PwLD to meet potential partners (Rohleder, 2010; Rohleder & Swartz, 2009; Rushbrooke et al., 2014). It is widely reported that PwLD are at greater risk of peer victimisation and social exclusion (Baines et al., 2018; Kavanagh et al., 2018), which may be related to the increased prevalence of mental health conditions experienced by these individuals (Cooper et al., 2007). Romantic relationships are fundamental to positive mental

wellbeing, regardless of the presence of a difficulty or difference (Bates et al., 2017), and as such we should be ensuring that PwLD have the skills and knowledge necessary to develop healthy romantic relationships whilst reducing vulnerability to abuse.

It is essential that CYPwLD are able to access appropriate and effective RSE, to ensure that they are equipped with the skills necessary to remain safe in society, develop healthy and happy romantic relationships, and generally experience positive wellbeing through a strong sense of belonging and self-esteem.

1.6. Mental Capacity

The Mental Capacity Act (2005) provides a legal framework for decision making processes, such as consent, for individuals over 16 in England and Wales who may have limitations on their mental capacity to make certain decisions themselves. Having a LD may influence an individual's capacity to make specific decisions and may have relevance in some cases, however it is important to note that whilst an individual may lack capacity for certain decisions this does not mean that they do not have capacity for all decisions. The Act provides five principles aiming to protect individuals and support their ability to make informed decisions about themselves, which are outlined in table 1.

Table 1.

The Mental Capacity Act (2005): Five core principles

Principle	Description
Presumption of capacity	All adults have the right to make decisions should they have the capacity to do so, which should be assumed unless agreed otherwise. As such, having a LD does not mean that an individual does not have mental capacity and it should not be assumed otherwise.
Maximising decision-making capacity	Individuals should receive appropriate support in making decisions, and as such necessary steps should be taken to support them before concluding that they do not have capacity.
Right to make unwise decisions	Individuals have a right to make decisions potentially deemed unwise by others.
Best interests	Any decisions taken concluding a lack of capacity must be within the individual's best interests.
Least restrictive options	Any decisions made on behalf of an individual must be the least restrictive option possible in terms of their freedom and rights.

Such decisions must be taken with caution in collaboration with the individual, family and key professionals with consideration of human rights. However, whether an individual is deemed to have mental capacity in terms of sexual relationships or not, this does not mean that they are not a sexual being, and as such their rights should be considered in terms of access to RSE, sexual expression or how they are understood (Cifelli, 2017).

1.7. Perspectives on the Provision of RSE for CYPwLD

The provision of RSE for CYPwLD is influenced by a range of perspectives, however it is essential that we understand and prioritise the perspectives of individuals with LD themselves and their families. These perspectives offer invaluable insights into the lived experiences, needs, and aspirations of those directly impacted by RSE.

1.7.1. Perspectives of individuals with a LD

Schaafsma et al. (2017) investigated the perspectives of PwLD on sexually related topics, aiming to inform the development of more accessible, relevant and effective RSE programmes in the Netherlands. They held semi-structured interviews with 20 individuals with LD, covering topics such as sex, relationships, sex education, parenthood, social media, and support. They found that participants had only accessed RSE once or twice during their life, with their knowledge of sexuality and relationships limited to more biologically related topics such as contraception and

intercourse. Further, this knowledge was noted as superficial, potentially due to limited depth within RSE programmes. The participants reported to have enjoyed RSE, finding it 'interesting, fun and nice' (Schaafsma et al., 2017, p. 25) and reflected the importance of RSE in supporting the development of happy and healthy relationships. Consequently, the findings indicated a need for high quality RSE to support the wellbeing of PwLD. However, the apparent provision in place did not appear to appropriately reflect the needs of PwLD, lacking appropriate depth, relevance, and consistency. This study was conducted in the Netherlands, however, meaning that these findings may not be generalised to the experiences of PwLD in the UK, especially given that religious and cultural difference can influence attitudes and perspectives towards RSE (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019).

1.7.2. Family Perspectives

Lafferty et al. (2012) investigated the barriers to RSE in Northern Ireland, involving a total of almost 100 stakeholders. They held two initial focus groups with 26 self-selected carers of teenagers and young adults with LD, and a further 19 interviews with 22 carers. Regarding the need and reality of RSE, nearly all of the participants advocated for age appropriate RSE, highlighting issues of equality, confusion around developmental changes and safety. Parents did not feel that the provision in schools was appropriate and discussed difficulties in providing appropriate RSE within the home environment. Following a thematic content analysis (Burnard, 1991), four core barriers were identified, including: protection versus personal development, lack of training, scarcity of educational resources, and cultural prohibitions.

Pownall et al. (2012) explored the attitudes, experiences and support needs of mothers regarding the sexuality and RSE of their children in Scotland. The researchers interviewed 30 mothers of young people with a LD and 30 mothers of young people without an LD or other disability using a structured questionnaire which also included rating scales, thus gathering both quantitative and qualitative data. They found that mothers of children LD shared a similar commitment to ensuring effective RSE for their children compared to mothers of children without LD. However, they did report having fewer conversations about sexual topics with their children, displaying more caution when broaching these subjects. This caution stemmed from concerns about their children's vulnerability, and a maternal instinct to protect them from potential harm, leading them to place a greater emphasis on discussions surrounding safety. Thus, the study revealed a dissonance between what these mothers perceived their responsibility to be and what they had actually communicated to their children. Consequently, it highlights the challenges associated with relying solely on parents to provide comprehensive RSE for their children, suggesting that such responsibilities should not be placed exclusively in the hands of parents.

Both studies, however, indicated some differences in parental attitudes as to the appropriateness of RSE for their children for a variety of reasons. Thus, it is important to note that parents are able to exercise their right to withdraw their child from RSE in all cases (DfE, 2019). This may be in relation cultural, religious, and personal beliefs that families hold. RSE often covers sensitive and intimate topics, and respecting a family's values and beliefs is an essential aspect of ensuring respect for choice and difference. Furthermore, it respects the principle of individual

autonomy within families. While schools play a vital role in education, the ultimate responsibility for a child's upbringing does rest with their caregivers, who are often in the best position to gauge their child's readiness for certain topics, enabling them to make informed decisions about when and how to introduce sensitive subjects.

Allowing parents to withdraw their child from RSE empowers them to make decisions that they believe are in the best interest of their child, in line with their family's values and priorities. Thus, it is essential that caregivers are reminded of these rights and actively engaged in ongoing discussions around their children's education.

1.8. The Role of Teachers

Teachers hold a crucial role in ensuring that PwLD receive effective RSE that is both inclusive and appropriate. It is imperative that CYPwLD have access to RSE that goes beyond merely developing sexual health knowledge. Contrary to previous teaching practices (British Humanist Association, 2017), the focus should also aim to promote positive overall well-being, while combatting the discrimination that PwLD have historically faced, essentially being withheld vital information necessary for developing healthy relationships (Ofsted, 2013; Schaafsma et al., 2017). Teachers have a unique opportunity to provide PwLD with the knowledge and skills they need to navigate the complexities of relationships and sexual health. They can do so within a safe, respectful, and supportive environment where PwLD can explore and learn about their own sexual rights, choices, and responsibilities.

Traditionally, the responsibility for comprehensive RSE has fallen largely onto caregivers, who have shared their experiences of the complexities around this dual

role, especially in experiencing dilemmas around the appropriate actions to ensure their children remain safe from harm (Lafferty et al., 2012; Pownall et al., 2012).

Teachers do not hold the same dual role as caregivers, and additionally have access to training, resources and support from their colleagues, thus placing them in, potentially, a more appropriate position to provide RSE for those families who feel it is appropriate for their child's education.

However, teaching RSE to PwLD does not come without challenge. It requires flexibility, patience, and a tailored approach to meet diverse learning styles and needs, whilst addressing the stigma surrounding the sexuality of PwLD. With the right guidance and support, teachers can empower PwLD to make informed decisions, form meaningful connections, and navigate the path to a happy and healthy adulthood.

Although RSE has now become mandatory in England, the level of guidance around this remains broad. This raises questions as to how RSE is being delivered across specialist provisions and whether schools and teachers are in need of further support to ensure that all CYPwLD have access to high-quality and inclusive RSE.

1.9. Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of the national context surrounding RSE provision for CYPwLDs in England. With RSE now compulsory and finally recognised as fundamental for the holistic development of all students, including those with LDs, the need to support its effective delivery has never been clearer.

Through examining the perspectives of individuals with LDs and their families, alongside research revealing gaps in PwLDs' understanding of RSE, the necessity of inclusive RSE to ensure equitable access to information and support becomes evident. However, the essential responsibility for delivering RSE to CYPwLDs predominantly rests with teachers. Yet, the current guidance provides limited information on how to effectively deliver RSE, potentially leaving teachers managing uncertainties. Thus, this highlights a need for further investigation into teachers' experiences and needs in this area.

Chapter 2 - Literature Review

2.1. Overview and Purpose

This section delves into a systematically informed and critical review of existing literature undertaken by the researcher. The delivery of effective and appropriate RSE for all has been clearly emphasised within both legislation and literature, not only in terms of safety but in terms of supporting the health and wellbeing of CYP within their education and in providing key life skills to support them throughout adulthood (see chapter 1). However, the issue of RSE for CYPwLD within educational settings remains somewhat ambiguous. Though there is evident concern around the issue (e.g. Baines et al., 2018; Lafferty et al., 2012), literature into the complex and interacting factors, which may be crucial in understanding how we can support teachers in delivering RSE for CYPwLD in schools remains limited, especially within the UK. Consequently, this systematically informed critical review of the literature aims to address the following literature review question (LRQ): *'What does the published literature tell us about teachers experiences of delivering RSE for PwLD?'* This question serves as a foundation for understanding the extent of exploration in the current literature and identifying areas that are less understood. This subsequently aided in formulating a research question that could bring about novel insights for EPs and potentially other stakeholders, including policymakers, educational and healthcare professionals. The chapter elaborates on the systematic methodology employed for the literature review and presents the findings.

2.2. Literature Search

2.2.1. Search Strategy

Between October 2022 and February 2023, several initial scoping searches were conducted, revealing a scarcity of research on RSE for CYPwLD, especially within the UK. Subsequently, more systematically informed literature searches took place from October 2023 to March 2024, utilising databases through EBSCOhost, including PsychInfo, ERIC, and PsycArticles. Given the limited published research on the topic within the UK, no country limiters were applied. The initial search terms were derived from the LRQ (see appendix A) and adapted throughout the course of multiple searches which were performed to refine parameters and identify the most appropriate search terms before a final systematically informed search was made on November 15, 2023 which was then rerun on April 9, 2024. Further details regarding the initial search processes, adjustments made and combinations of search terms used can be found in appendix A. The final search terms used within the systematically informed review are presented in table 2.

Table 2.

Mapping, search terms and Boolean operators

Category	Key word search term	Expanded search term
Participant	1. teacher	OR educator OR “special educat*”
	AND	

Subject	2. “sex* education”	
	AND	
Subject*	3. “Learning difficulty”	OR “learning disability”
		OR “intellectual disability”
		OR “developmental disability”
	AND	
Outcome	4. Experience	OR view
		OR perspective

* Outdated terms were not used as the studies would likely represent outdated views

2.2.2. Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The inclusion and exclusion criteria applied during the literature search are summarised in Table 3 below.

Table 3.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Rationale	Exclusion criteria
Studies published between 2010 – 2023.	To ensure relevance of the literature. Scoping searches had revealed a scarcity of research in the	Published before 2010.

	area and as such 2010	
	was identified as allowing	
	a breadth of research for	
	the review whilst	
	remaining relevant.	
Written / translated into the English Language.	To enable comprehension of the author.	Written in languages other than English.
Empirical research articles.	To enable effective critical appraisal.	Secondary sources.
Peer-reviewed academic journals.	To ensure research credibility.	Non-peer reviewed journals.
Research exploring teachers experiences of delivering RSE for PwLD.	Consistent with the LRQ. Due to limitations on available research in the area, as well as cultural differences in school age, the review will include papers investigating RSE for PwLD across the lifespan.	Research exploring alternative experiences/views on the delivery of RSE for PwLD e.g. family/individual perspectives/healthcare professionals. Research exploring teachers perspectives on

the delivery of RSE for individuals with primary focus on an alternative diagnosis e.g. Autism Spectrum Condition (ASC).

Intervention / outcomes studies.

2.2.3. Study Selection Process

The literature search yielded a total of 64 papers. Initially, automation tools were employed to apply inclusion and exclusion criteria (e.g., publication date between 2010-2023, English language, etc.), narrowing down the selection to 37 papers. Subsequently, duplicates were removed and the criteria outlined in Table 3 were utilised to assess the titles and abstracts of the remaining 29 papers for relevance. In cases where the title and abstract did not provide sufficient information, a thorough examination of the full paper against the inclusion and exclusion criteria was conducted. This process led to the exclusion of 22 papers. A list of excluded papers and the rationale for such exclusion is presented in appendix B.

The search process resulted in the inclusion of seven papers in the literature review (Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Ogur et al., 2023; Rohleder, 2010; Shuib et al., 2022; Wilkenfeld & Ballan,

2011). An additional two UK based papers were identified through snowballing methods and have been included in the review due to their high level of relevance to the topic and cultural relevance as no other UK based literature was identified within the systematically informed search (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Finlay et al., 2015). Key information, summarising the author(s), title, location, sample, design, measures, data analysis and findings can be found in appendix D.

See appendix C for a PRISMA diagram (Page et al., 2021) summarising the search results and study selection process.

2.2.4. Critical Appraisal

To provide a level of insight into the quality of literature identified within the search, the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) 10-question checklist (CASP, 2023) was used to guide a critical examination of the qualitative papers identified within the review. The review additionally highlighted one paper utilising a quantitative survey methodology which was critically appraised using Holland and Rees's (2010) framework for critiquing quantitative research. To enhance transparency and aid in interpreting the review conclusions, a summary of the CASP findings is presented in table 4 and a summary of the Holland and Rees (2010) framework findings is presented in table 5, utilising the same yes/no/can't tell classifications for ease of comparison.

However, it is important to acknowledge that evaluating the quality of literature remains a topic of ongoing discussion. Determining the quality of research is

complex and subjective, and checklists alone cannot definitively categorise research as good or bad (Walsh & Downe, 2006). Furthermore, the appraisal of research faces limitations tied to the clarity of the academic write up (Atkins et al., 2008). Papers lacking sufficient information do not necessarily imply low-value research; rather, it creates challenges in developing well-informed interpretations.

Table 4.*CASP overview*

Questions	Nelson et al. (2020)	Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al. (2017)	Wilkenfeld & Ballan (2011)	Rohleder (2010)	Ogur et al. (2023)	Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis (2019)	Borawska-Charko et al. (2023)	Finlay et al. (2015)
Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	Yes	Yes	No	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Is qualitative methodology appropriate?	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes

Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell
Was the data collected in a way that addressed the research issue?	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell

Has the relationship between researcher and participants been adequately considered?	No	No	No	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	No	No
Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	Yes	No	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Can't tell	Can't tell

Is there a clear statement of findings?	Yes	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes	Yes	Can't tell	Yes
How valuable is the research?	Valuable	Lacking	Reasonable	Valuable	Valuable	Valuable	Reasonable	Reasonable

Table 5.

Holland and Rees (2010): A framework for critiquing quantitative research articles – overview

Aspect	Shuib et al. (2022)
Focus	Can't tell
Background	No
Aim	Yes
Methodology or broad approach	Yes
Tool of data collection	Can't tell
Method of data analysis and presentation	Yes

Sample	No
Ethical considerations	No
Main findings	Yes
Conclusions and recommendations	No
Overall strengths and limitations	No
Application to practice	No
Summary	Lacking

2.3. Overview of Included Literature

This review seeks to offer a comprehensive overview of the research papers' objectives and conduct a critical analysis of the applied research methodologies. Particular attention will be directed towards the key findings that directly relate to the LRQ. Additionally, the review will consider the strengths and limitations inherent in the study designs, evaluating the perceived reliability and validity of the findings. Ultimately, the concluding discussion will centre on how the present research endeavours to address the identified gaps within the existing literature.

In the context of this review, a unified term, RSE, has been employed to encompass various expressions related to sex education, acknowledging the potential semantic variations across cultures and curriculums present within the presented literature. Similarly, the term LD is used uniformly to refer to the previously defined needs (see section 1.2), where appropriate, recognising that such terminologies differ in diverse cultural contexts and subsequently vary across the presented literature.

2.3.1. Aims of the Included Literature

The aims of the identified literature included: to explore what it meant for teachers to teach RSE to students with LD (Nelson et al., 2020); to determine what 'sexual problems' individuals with LD experience and what kind of RSE should be provided for these individuals (Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017); to explore the reasons surrounding limited opportunities for RSE based interventions for individuals with LD and the anxieties expressed by educators around these topics (Rohleder, 2010); to

describe and summarise the opinions and experiences of teachers working with 'intellectual and developmental disabilities' (IDD) from various countries (Ogur et al., 2023); to both describe and understand professionals views and experiences of RSE in special schools in relation to honour-related experiences (HRE) among CYPwLD (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019); to investigate the challenges faced by educators when delivering RSE for children and adults with LD and the ways these can be overcome with an emphasis on educators views (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023); to investigate how RSE is delivered in practice with consideration of barriers, perceived need, intuitional and societal context and the challenges faced (Finlay et al., 2015); and to explore variations in the assessment of knowledge, practices, vision, attitudes, and commitment among teachers, considering differences in their level of experience and geographic locations in relation to RSE for CYPwLD (Shuib et al., 2022). Wilkenfeld and Ballan (2011) did not provide an overarching aim, however the presented research questions are centred around educators attitudes and beliefs around RSE for children and adults with LD.

2.3.2. Location and Sample

Each of the studies in this review employed purposive sampling to ensure that selected individuals were well-suited to address the specific research questions. Three of the studies (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Nelson et al., 2020; Ogur et al., 2023) explicitly outlined their inclusion/exclusion criteria within the sampling process. Geographically, the studies were diverse, with two in Sweden (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020); two primarily within the UK (Borawska-Charko et

al., 2023; Finlay et al., 2015), although Borawska-Charko et al. (2023) additionally recruited two participants from New Zealand stating justification based around curriculum similarity; one in Turkey (Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017); one in South Africa (Rohleder, 2010); one in the United States of America (USA; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011); and one in Malaysia (Shuib et al., 2022). Ogur et al. (2023) aimed for an international sample, but the majority of participants were Turkish, potentially biasing the results in relation to the studies international aims.

Five of the included studies recruited teachers from special schools supporting CYPwLD (Finlay et al., 2015; Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Shuib et al., 2022). Although there are cultural variations in is defined as 'school age', the studies that reported on pupil age included provision for those between 16-21 years, consistent with the SEND code of practice's 0-25 age range for CYP in the England (Department for Education, 2015). Four of the included studies recruited a sample of both special school teachers and adult programme educators (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Ogur et al., 2023; Rohleder, 2010; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011).

Concerning the population supported, four studies focused on individuals with LD exclusively, with diagnoses ranging from mild to severe (Finlay et al., 2015; Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Rohleder, 2010; Shuib et al., 2022). Three studies noted diagnoses in addition to LD including complex and physical needs (Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011) and ASC (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023). Those participating in Ogur et al. (2023)'s study supported a range of 'intellectual *and* developmental disabilities'. For the purpose of

the review, it was determined that a large enough proportion of teachers/educators in the sample supported PwLD and as such the study was included.

With regard to sample size, a majority of the studies included relatively small samples ranging from 7-32 participants (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Ogur et al., 2023; Rohleder, 2010; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011), whilst one of the studies had a much larger sample consisting of 516 participants (Shuib et al., 2022). Finlay et al. (2015) included four interview participants alongside four video recordings of both facilitators and young people, however it is unclear exactly how many participants were involved in the whole study. While some argue for the benefits of having more participants in research, enhancing reliability and generalisability (Coolican, 2014), smaller groups can be considered equally valuable. They can offer a more profound and nuanced understanding of participants' views and experiences, aligning well with the qualitative approaches employed by these studies (Crouch & McKenzie, 2006).

2.3.3. Research Design and Data Collection Methods

A majority of the studies utilised a qualitative research design, aligning with overarching aims seeking to provide insight into the participants views and experiences (Coolican, 2014). Of these studies, three utilised semi-structured individual interviews which took place on one occasion (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Nelson et al., 2020). Two studies opted for a structured format, either in person (Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011) or using a

structured, written interview form (Ogur et al., 2023). The final three qualitative studies utilised multiple methods, combining individual interviews with focus groups (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Rohleder, 2010) and conversation analysis (Finlay et al., 2015). While one study, conducted by Shuib et al. (2022), opted for a quantitative research design employing a survey methodology, the absence of information regarding the reliability and validity of the instrument raises concerns about the robustness of the findings.

2.3.4. Data Analysis

Three of the studies utilised a content analysis approach (Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Ogur et al., 2023; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011), providing some outline as to the process by which data was analysed. Interestingly, Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al. (2017) and Ogur (2023) appeared to focus solely on the manifest content, overlooking the context or deeper meanings of the data (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004). While content analysis provides a more structured and objective approach to studying potentially difficult topics like RSE, a possible criticism lies in its potential to maintain a certain level of detachment. The focus on manifest content and the standardised coding may lead to overlooking the nuanced and emotive aspects associated with RSE, potentially limiting a comprehensive understanding of participants' experiences and emotions (Graneheim & Lundman, 2004).

Five of the studies used approaches centred more clearly around the realms of experience and emotion. Nelson et al. (2020) used a phenomenological approach (Dahlberg et al., 2008), providing a transparent analysis process. Braun & Clarke's

(2006) thematic analysis was adopted by Borawska-Charko et al. (2023) and Finlay et al. (2015), while Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis (2019) utilised a thematic analysis grounded in their theoretical framework rather than a predefined approach. However, the researchers did not clearly articulate the logical processes guiding the development of findings, making it challenging to assess the credibility of the claims in relation to the presented data (Thorne, 2000). Rohleder (2010) employed a comprehensive two-phase analysis, initially applying discourse analysis (Banister et al., 1994) and subsequently delving into a psychosocial analysis (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000). Not only facilitating triangulation of findings, the combination of a psychosocial approach alongside discourse analysis allows for exploration of the contextual factors influencing language use.

By contrast to the above, in their quantitative study, Shuib et al. (2022) employed descriptive statistical analysis, incorporating a two-way MANOVA test to discern variations in knowledge, practices, vision, attitudes, and commitment based on both location and experience. While this statistical approach is effective in uncovering overall differences across groups, it falls short when it comes to drawing causal inferences (Stevens, 2009). Additionally, the study didn't look at confounding factors that could affect the results, making it important to remain cautious when connecting differences to the chosen variables.

2.3.5. Theoretical Frameworks

Only a subset of the studies included in the literature review referenced explicit theoretical frameworks. Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis (2019) drew upon sexual script

theory (Gagnon & Simon, 2005), to contextualise their thematic analysis, understanding sexuality within a historical, cultural, and social framework. Shuib et al. (2022) utilised Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy theory of motivation, linking teacher self-efficacy and performance achievement, suggesting that teachers efficacy beliefs impact upon their motivation and vision. Rohleder (2010) incorporated a psychosocial approach (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000), recognising individuals as both psychic and social beings who utilise various social discourses to position themselves in specific relations to others.

2.4. Thematic Content of the Presented Literature

To synthesise the literature in this review and pinpoint the key themes and findings of the included research, a thematic approach will be employed (Aveyard, 2014). This method follows a three-stage process, involving a comprehensive summary of all included studies (as detailed in preceding sections), the allocation of themes to the data following a thematic analysis (Aveyard, 2014; see appendix E), and the presentation of findings through a comparative analysis in relation to these identified themes in subsequent sections.

2.4.1. Theory to Practice in RSE Lessons

The examined literature has exposed a gap between the theoretical underpinnings of RSE and the practical challenges encountered by teachers in its delivery. While there are ongoing dialogues about the content that should be taught, teachers'

narratives reflect the challenges faced in actual classrooms, particularly when supporting learners with diverse needs.

As previously discussed, two studies utilised a content analysis focusing primarily on the manifest content involved in teaching RSE to PwLD (Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Ogur et al., 2023), a theme also central within Borawska-Charko et al.'s (2023) findings, despite using a different method of analysis. Both Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al. (2017) and Ogur et al. (2023) found that some teachers placed strong emphasis on the importance of the scientific components of RSE, such as human development during puberty, hygiene and sexual health, with one teacher stating that the scope of RSE involves “The structure of genitals, gender differences, and hygiene.” (Ogur et al., 2023, p. 47). However, some teachers also discussed the social and emotional content of sex and relationships, highlighting the importance of teaching about “emotional relationships” (Ogur et al., 2023, p. 47) as well as “helping them to have a social life and not be lonely” (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023, p. 211).

Several studies discussed the importance of teaching around socially appropriate behaviour, especially in light of boundaries around masturbation and “tendencies such as approaching to opposite gender, touching, hugging and kissing” (Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017, p. 110), with many students showing limited awareness of what may be considered public and private behaviours (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Ogur et al., 2023; Rohleder, 2010; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011).

Borawska-Charko et al. (2023) additionally found that the vulnerability and safety of the people with LD they worked with was a key topic, such that “it virtually covers the

whole of [RSE]" (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023, p. 209). Discussions about vulnerability to abuse or ensuring safety were emotionally charged and prevalent across a majority of the studies especially in relation to teaching about consent (Finlay et al., 2015; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Ogur et al., 2023; Rohleder, 2010; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011), with one teacher emphasising that "they need to know that they can be empowered to say no that they can be – that sexuality is actually very nice and very beautiful" (Rohleder, 2010, p. 177). Borawska-Charko et al. (2023) additionally found that some students were using the internet and social media more than face-to-face socialising, emphasising the importance of teaching about internet safety within such discussions. One teacher in Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis' (2019) study additionally considered the role of intersectionality when considering students vulnerability, explaining:

We are discussing what factors makes you extra exposed, in addition to disability. It can be a weak economic situation or social class, or it can be cultural or ethnic factors like gender and age as well. We try to identify this complexity. (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019, p. 60).

In addition to addressing the foundational aspects of RSE, a subset of teachers in the reviewed studies ventured into teaching about equality, diversity and inclusion in relation to sexuality. Borawska-Charko et al. (2023) found that teachers had experienced both positive and negative attitudes towards LGBTQ+ communities from students, and as such felt it was important to teach them that "...everyone has got a right to relationship whether it's the same sex or not" (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023, p. 211). Additionally, although Nelson et al. (2020) found that teachers widely

held a heteronormative perspective, it was still seen as important to teach students to “respect and accept differences” (Nelson et al., 2020, p. 406).

However, when it comes to the reality of teaching about such topics within RSE, several studies found that teachers encountered a number of challenges. The most frequently cited challenge came in relation to the individual differences in cognitive ability of the PwLD they were supporting, especially when teaching in groups (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Finlay et al., 2015; Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Ogur et al., 2023; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011). Nelson et al. (2020) additionally found that these differences were dynamic and fluctuated between topics and situations, for example one teacher reported that:

We can have a discussion . . . [with a student] that has a family and all that, meaning that he’s raising kids, and yet he is in his age a teen-dad. But when I put other demands on him, he can switch down to a six-year-old, sit down with his arms crossed and say, ‘No I’m not going to do that’ (Nelson et al., 2020, p. 404).

In both Borawska-Charko et al. (2023) and Finlay et al.’s (2015) studies, teachers faced considerable challenges in grasping students’ level of comprehension during their lessons. Finlay et al. (2015) found that these difficulties were particularly prevalent when delving into abstract concepts or employing complex sentence structures. The young people were able to demonstrate their understanding through various means, including performing requested actions, answering questions verbally, or contributing relevant comments. However, less reliable indications

involved patterns like echoing others or responding to simple yes/no questions, which were often accepted by the teacher without further verification (Finlay et al., 2015).

Several studies found that the students exhibited relatively 'black-and-white thinking', creating challenges in supporting the transfer of information gained from RSE sessions to broader contexts (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019). This was especially prevalent when teaching about socially appropriate behaviours as these social rules (e.g. asking before hugging someone) as these are typically circumstantial.

The majority of the studies in the review predominantly focused on the challenges encountered by teachers in RSE lessons, creating a largely problem-centric perspective. However, a limited number of studies delved, at least somewhat, into the strategies employed by teachers to overcome these difficulties. In Borawska-Charko et al.'s (2023) study, teachers outlined various proactive approaches, including starting early, incorporating visuals, engaging in collaborative online research, using humour and ice-breaking activities, emphasising repetition and overlearning, and tailoring their methods to suit individual needs. Similarly, Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al.'s (2017) highlighted the importance of adaptive teaching and emphasised the need for validating students feelings, however two teachers also felt that RSE should be taught by a teacher of the same sex, which may be related to cultural differences. Teachers in Ogur et al.'s (2023) study discussed specific methods such as functional communication training, discussions and setting boundaries whilst emphasising the importance of validating students feelings.

Similarly, they also discussed use of visuals, videos and texts. One teacher additionally discussed the importance of providing RSE in both group and individual sessions. Teachers in Wilkenfeld & Ballan's (2011) study emphasised the importance of using a multisensory approach and creative use of materials.

Overall, it appears that teachers hold relatively diverse perspectives regarding the content and teaching methods of RSE, possibly influenced by cultural nuances, which emphasises the complexity and subjectivity of the topic area. However, amidst these differences, there appears a more unified agreement when it comes to the challenges faced in delivering effective RSE.

2.4.2. Navigating Dynamics Between Home and School

Understanding and addressing parents views towards RSE for PwLD is a crucial aspect of ensuring comprehensive and inclusive education. Borawska-Charko et al. (2023), Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis (2019) and Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al. (2017) found that teachers discussed variations in parental attitudes towards RSE, with some individuals being withdrawn from their lessons. Engaging with parents who held less supportive views on their children receiving RSE proved to be a challenge, particularly when addressing sensitive topics such as inappropriate sexual behaviours at school. Anxieties were often centred around concerns of children becoming 'oversexed', with one teacher stating:

I came across parents who have said: 'I don't want her to know that she has got a vagina, I don't want her to know that she can put anything there in case

other people would start putting things up there' (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023, p. 206).

This issue was additionally reflected in Rohleder's (2010) findings, with prevalent discourses around the idea that RSE may actually be problematic for PwLD.

Interestingly, the study suggested that these experiences of parental anxiety may actually be a projection of the teachers own anxieties in delivering RSE.

Two studies emphasised the significance of collaboration with parents to navigate these challenges. Borawska-Charko et al. (2023) found that cooperation, transparency and consistency were key to overcoming these challenges and additionally facilitated better outcomes for the individuals they were supporting. Similarly, Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al. (2017) discussed the importance of working with parents to develop the curriculum and gain their support. Such collaborations could establish greater consistency between home and school, potentially reducing difficulties around the generalisation of information between contexts, as previously discussed.

Teachers in Nelson et al. (2020) and Rohleder's (2010) studies discussed the importance of their role in supporting parents who find it challenging to discuss RSE topics at home. For example, one teacher explained:

And now for all those parents who can't talk to their children and don't know how to talk to their children and never have spoken to their children about their sexuality, I just need to do it. I need to do it because they need it (Rohleder, 2010, p. 177).

Thus, the role of teachers extends beyond the classroom, encompassing collaboration with parents. The studies discussed emphasise the challenges posed by varying parental attitudes and the importance of overcoming these difficulties to best support PwLD. Collaborative efforts, including cooperation, transparency, and consistency, have been identified as key strategies in supporting understanding and achieving positive outcomes. By acknowledging and addressing parental concerns, teachers can contribute significantly to creating an environment where RSE for PwLD is not only taught in schools but is also reinforced and supported in the home, enhancing the overall effectiveness of RSE.

2.4.3. Roles and Responsibilities in RSE: Balancing Commitment and Uncertainty

In delivering RSE, teachers assume a crucial role loaded with a high level of responsibility and complexity, grappling with the weight of shaping young minds in a rapidly evolving world. A prevailing theme across the literature is the recognition of teachers' heightened sense of responsibility, driven by concerns for social justice and the safety of their students. However, amidst this sense of responsibility, an undercurrent theme of anxiety surfaces as teachers question their suitability and competence in navigating RSE.

A key theme highlighted in the literature revolves around the human right to express one's sexuality. Many teachers discussed the nature of sexuality as an integral and natural aspect of human existence, emphasising their role in providing RSE to support PwLD's human right to develop intimate and fulfilling relationships

(Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Nelson et al., 2020; Ogur et al., 2023; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011), with one teacher emphasising “the commonality we all have as people; we all have the same life emotions and challenges” (Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011, p. 355). However, this sense of social justice came with a heightened sense of responsibility. Teachers emphasised that RSE is centred around “so much more than just sex” (Nelson et al., 2020, p. 402), with key topics supporting their transition into a happy, healthy and safe adulthood. Such responsibilities led to heightened emotional experiences, with Rohleder (2010) finding that teachers experienced dilemmas in wanting to support the rights of PwLD, whilst holding fear that they may be inadvertently causing harm, with one teacher explaining “I still have feelings of anxiety. Is this going to be okay? I always fear... that they are going to go off and act out what we have been teaching them” (Rohleder, 2010, p. 176).

Yet, in the findings of Wilkenfeld & Ballan’s (2011), certain educators expressed disapproval or ambivalence towards the idea of individuals they were supporting moving on to build families. Despite the study's relative age, this stark contradiction to the earlier emphasis on human rights in the findings raises concerns about the enduring impact of equality issues on PwLD.

This heightened sense of responsibility appeared to lead teachers question the suitability of their role in delivering RSE for PwLD, leading to a tendency to displace this responsibility onto others. Wilkenfeld and Ballan’s (2011) study revealed that teachers perceived their primary role as teaching the core curriculum, considering RSE as beyond their training and expertise. Consequently, they suggested that family members or school-based professionals, such as school nurses, were better

equipped to teach RSE to PwLD. This sentiment was also evident in Nelson et al.'s (2020) study, where teachers grappled with dilemmas concerning the age and experience level of staff best suited to teach RSE. Some argued that older or more experienced teachers might feel more comfortable addressing the topic, while newer or younger teachers could better relate to students' experiences. Similarly to Wilkenfeld & Ballan (2011), teachers also discussed outsourcing other school based-professionals to support with RSE, emphasising that they were better positioned to teach the subject.

In relation to the above dilemmas around level of experience, Shuib et al.'s (2022) study delved into a reflective evaluation on RSE delivery for PwLD encompassing ratings of knowledge, practice, vision, attitude, and commitment in relation to teachers' experience levels and locations (urban/rural). Intriguingly, new teachers in both urban and rural settings displayed less optimism towards the topic when compared to their more experienced counterparts. Moreover, new teachers in both contexts rated their knowledge lower than experienced teachers, with the latter demonstrating better teaching practices. However, the exact metrics for measurement are unclear, meaning that these results could possibly be attributed to other characteristics, such as confidence. Nevertheless, the study implies that newer teachers in Malaysia may feel somewhat unprepared to tackle the subject, however, whether this finding is reflective of their actual skill set remains to be seen.

Additionally, dilemmas related to the role of teachers in delivering RSE for PwLD is further influenced by the diverse status of RSE in the school curriculum across different countries. In a majority of studies included in the review, RSE for PwLD was

not a compulsory element of the curriculum at the time of the research. For example, Wilkenfeld and Ballan (2011) explained that although RSE was compulsory for mainstream pupils in the District of Columbia, for students with disabilities this responsibility is diverted onto healthcare professionals. Similarly in South Africa, whilst HIV/AIDS prevention is core component of the curriculum, PwLD were generally excluded from lessons (Rohleder, 2010; Visser et al., 2004). Both Finlay (2015) and Borawska-Charko et al.'s (2023) studies were conducted within the UK. Although Borawska-Charko et al.'s (2023) study was published in 2023, the interviews were actually conducted in 2015, similarly to Finlay et al.'s (2015) data collection timeframe, when RSE for CYPwLD was not yet compulsory within the UK; this became mandatory in 2020 (DfE, 2019).

Ogur et al. (2023) conducted an international study, and as such there were some variations in policy. However, the results indicated that 56.2% of the teachers in their study (n=32) had *never* provided RSE to individuals with IDD throughout their professional careers. These teachers were from various countries, including Turkey, Canada, England, Kosovo, United States, Colombia, Macedonia, and Serbia. This finding is especially striking considering that teachers experience ranged from 4 to 40 years.

Both Nelson et al. (2020) and Löfgren-Mårtenson and Ouis's (2019) studies were conducted in Sweden, where RSE has been mandatory for over 50 years. However, it has been observed that many schools, including specialist provisions, do not offer adequate sex education to their students (Swedish Schools Inspectorate [Skolinspektionen], 2018). Additionally, in Sweden there has been a recent shift from

it being a specific subject to being integrated as a theme across all subjects within the curriculum (Swedish Schools Inspectorate [Skolinspektionen], 2018). Teachers in Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis's (2019) studies felt that this had 'invisibilised' the topic leaving diminished sense of responsibility, with one teacher explaining that "some [teachers] are good at including it, but then [to do this] you have to be comfortable talking about sex. When you are not comfortable, then you avoid it." (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019, p. 60). In line with this, Rohleder (2010) found that teachers tended to distance themselves from these narratives around RSE. This distancing, he suggested, was an attempt to defend against their own ambivalent emotions surrounding the provision of RSE for PwLD. Thus, it is possible that when roles in RSE are less precisely defined, it increases the likelihood of experiencing ambivalence and, consequently, avoidance of the topic.

The shift towards compulsory inclusion of RSE in the UK curriculum may have played a pivotal role in mitigating ambivalence among teachers and dispelling the displacement of their role. The legislative change (DfE, 2019) establishes a clear framework in relation to role, leaving little room for uncertainty or avoidance. When RSE is compulsory, teachers may be more likely to embrace their responsibilities with a defined scope, diminishing the potential for ambivalence. The mandatory nature of RSE may seek to ensure that educators recognise and accept their role in delivering comprehensive and inclusive RSE for PwLD. Consequently, the reduction of ambivalence and a more defined role may contribute to a more effective and consistent implementation of RSE within specialist educational settings.

2.4.4. RSE Within Wider Systemic and Cultural Contexts

In seeking to understand teachers' experiences of delivering RSE, it's crucial to acknowledge that a task such as this exists within a wider systemic and cultural context. These factors not only influence how educators may deliver information but also impact how it is received and integrated into the lives of those it aims to support.

In line with this, Ogur et al. (2023) found that there were significant variations in the content of RSE lessons across different countries. For example, topics such as body image and contraception, were only reported in Germany, while sexual identity was only reported Canada, and masturbation only reported in England. Meanwhile, teachers in Turkey and Germany emphasised privacy and sexual abuse in their RSE lessons. Interestingly, this finding introduces some divergence from the earlier findings in this review (see section 2.4.1.). While topics like sexual behaviours and sexual health were discussed across various cultural contexts (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Finlay et al., 2015; Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Ogur et al., 2023; Rohleder, 2010; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011), variations emerged in certain areas such as sexuality, emotions, and social skills, which were reported in only a subset of studies (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Nelson et al., 2020; Ogur et al., 2023; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011). It is worth noting, however, that variations in the timeframe of the studies may have contributed to some of these differences.

Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis's (2019) study specifically explored the role of cultural and religious differences in RSE for PwLD. The findings revealed the challenges

faced by PwLD in navigating diverse and conflicting sexual and cultural norms. Notably, students born and raised in Sweden but with parents from other countries found it challenging when visiting relatives in their parents' home countries. This difficulty stemmed from their struggle to comprehend the differential treatment of boys and girls in those countries compared to the approaches in Sweden. Teachers in the study grappled with the intricacies of imparting RSE within a Swedish cultural context while remaining sensitive to their students' home cultures and beliefs. The participants acknowledged the value of collaborating with professionals from diverse cultural backgrounds, describing them as 'culture-bridges' who bring a variety of cultural competencies to their educational settings. Teachers in Nelson et al.'s (2020) and Borawska-Charko et al.'s (2023) studies faced similar challenges, grappling with the complexities of balancing their personal experiences and values with the cultural and religious beliefs of their students.

Both Rohleder (2010) and Nelson et al. (2020) found that teachers also discussed the role organisations and systems in the delivery of RSE within their cultural and societal context. Rohleder (2010) found that teachers experienced resistance from affiliated organisations, schools and school staff regarding the provision of RSE for PwLD, construing RSE for PwLD as dangerous and explaining that it may be like opening 'pandoras box'. One manager explained:

They would freak out that they are now teaching people to become sexually active. And this particular organisation – I opened to . . . – I think it was about five years ago. They did a bit of work around sex, the next minute rumours were spreading that they were teaching all their residents how to have sex and that they must now all have sex (Rohleder, 2010, p. 174).

Teachers in Nelson et al.'s (2020) study additionally discussed systemic barriers relating to limited support at home, institutionalisation, and limited opportunities to develop their understanding of sexual knowledge informally internet and social media usage. This meant that teachers felt a further increased level of responsibility as the sole source of information on the subject. Teachers in Wilkenfeld & Ballan's (2011) study also provided wider reflections on the influence of society, with sexuality perceived as foreign or problematic in PwLD societal context, leading to feelings of frustration and challenges in supporting students' experiences of their own sexuality as a basic human right. One teacher in Borawska-Charko et al.'s (2023) study also considered the influences of society of RSE, explaining that it's "a bit of taboo topic really, particularly here in England. (...) I think for some people that's a real challenge" (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023, p. 207).

Taken together, the studies included in this review provide an understanding of the challenges teachers encounter in delivering RSE, acknowledging the intricate interplay of systemic, cultural, and individual factors. In the context of the UK, the cultural and systemic nuances across the literature highlights the need for further research specifically tailored to the UK policy and practice. By recognising the cultural and systemic context of RSE, future research can provide more targeted insights to inform effective RSE delivery within the UK educational system, especially in light of recent legislative changes (DfE, 2019).

2.4.5. Understanding Teachers Needs

The studies conducted by Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis (2019) and Ogur et al. (2023) shed light on teachers' advocacy for further support to ensure they are providing best practice in RSE for their students.

One teacher emphasised the necessity of further education, guidelines, and supervision for educators working in schools (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019). Teachers also expressed the need for more comprehensive understanding and support in providing appropriate and effective RSE for PwLD, with one teacher from Kosovo stressing the importance of further investigation in the area, stating, "It is very important. Because it is a subject that we have difficulty in, we need information about" (Ogur et al., 2023, p. 746). Similarly, a teacher from England emphasised the need for evidence-based research in the field of RSE for PwLD, acknowledging the variation in learning needs among students and framing it as a substantial problem needing further investigation (Ogur et al., 2023). These findings collectively emphasise the necessity for targeted support, professional development, and evidence-based resources to empower teachers in effectively delivering RSE to PwLD.

2.5. Summary and Current Research

Overall, the existing literature highlights the subjective nature of RSE and subsequent diversity in the content covered within RSE lessons for PwLD, encompassing topics from sexual health, human development, to social skills and

sexual identity. This appears to be influenced by the cultural contexts these lessons exist in, shaping the approaches teachers adopt in their classrooms. However, the practical implementation of RSE is complexed by a series of barriers, spanning from the distinctive needs of the individuals to broader systemic and cultural contexts. Whilst grappling these challenges, teachers hold a high level of responsibility in providing RSE, driven by a commitment to support the rights of the individuals at the centre. This responsibility, at times, seems to evoke feelings of ambivalence and anxiety, leading to instances where the role may be deferred to others, a task potentially made easier by the loose legislative framework surrounding the compulsion of RSE for PwLD across various countries. This complex interplay between theoretical ideals and real-world challenges highlights the need for further research, particularly in the UK context, to inform targeted strategies that empower teachers in effectively delivering RSE, ensuring that the unique needs of diverse learners are met with sensitivity and efficacy. The main implication of the systematic literature review is the pressing need for comprehensive UK-based research to understand how the relatively new compulsory status of RSE has been adopted in practice. This is essential to inform and improve teaching practices, develop effective guidance, and create robust support systems for teachers and education professionals.

Additionally, in the context of the reviewed literature it is crucial to note that participants, by default, have opted to engage in the delivery of RSE within their roles. Thus, the existing literature provides an insight into teachers' experiences where the provision of RSE may have been a voluntary choice. However, it is essential to recognise that in the UK RSE has become compulsory in all schools,

including specialist provisions, meaning that the context has undergone a significant shift (DfE, 2019). The new mandatory requirement has created a noticeable gap in the literature, where schools that may have previously chosen not to include RSE, or otherwise withdraw specific pupils, are now obligated to incorporate it into their curriculum for all CYP. Thus, it is imperative to explore whether these mandatory changes have impacted educators' experiences in delivering RSE for PwLD.

Finally, a further gap in the existing literature relates to the inclusion of teachers working across a broad spectrum of educational stages, ranging from primary to post-16 and adulthood. This variation introduces a considerable diversity in the needs, capacities, and developmental stages of students. Consequently, drawing clear conclusions becomes challenging, as each developmental stage comes with unique needs and challenges. This variability underscores the necessity for more targeted research efforts that focus on specific educational stages, enabling a deeper understanding of the dynamics and needs at each level.

Therefore, the following study aims to explore how secondary school teachers are experiencing the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD in light of recent legislative changes which made RSE mandatory in all schools from September 2020 (DfE, 2019). In doing so, it is hoped the research and uncover what contributes to experiences of success and challenge in the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD, so we can understand how best to support teachers, and subsequently the CYP they support, to promote inclusive RSE for all.

While existing research in this domain has originated from various disciplines such as Social Medicine, Special Education, Psychology, and Social Work, this study takes a novel approach by exploring the phenomenon through the lens of Educational Psychology. Thus, aiming to provide insight into how Educational Psychologists can leverage their role to support school staff and ensure positive outcomes for CYPwLD.

Qualitative methods, including interviews, focus groups and conversation analysis have been employed to gain insights into teachers' experiences in delivering RSE for PwLD. Analytic methods such as thematic analysis, content analysis, and phenomenological analysis have contributed to understanding this complex subject. However, the lack of clarity in explaining some analytic methods does raise questions about the rigor of such research. To address this, the current study aims to adopt a more transparent approach, utilising unstructured interviews and Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA; Smith et al., 2022). The use of IPA in this study aims to provide deep understanding of participants' lived experience in delivering RSE for CYPwLD, which will be further explored in chapter 3.

Chapter 3 - Methodology

3.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter introduces the methodological framework adopted for the study. It begins by presenting the research question and delving into research paradigms, specifically justifying the application of IPA within the study's theoretical framework. Following this, the research design is described, covering participant recruitment, data collection methods, and considerations of reflexivity and ethics. Subsequently, the data analysis procedure is outlined, leading to a final discussion on research quality and ethical considerations. This comprehensive approach seeks to ensure transparency and ethical integrity throughout the research process.

3.2. Research Question

This study aimed to explore how secondary school teachers are experiencing the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD in light of recent legislative changes which made RSE mandatory in all schools in England from September 2020.

While developing the scope of this study, it was decided not to include CYPwLD who have received RSE. This decision was based on the identification of a more substantial body of literature already exploring the views and experiences of CYPwLD regarding RSE, as highlighted in various scoping reviews (e.g. Brown, 2019; Frawley & O'Shea, 2020; Turner & Crane, 2016; Schaafsma et al., 2017; Strnadová et al. 2021). In contrast, there appeared to be a more significant gap in

the literature concerning the experiences of teachers delivering RSE to this group, especially given the legislative shift. Teachers play a crucial role in the practical implementation of RSE guidance, and their perspectives are essential for understanding the challenges and successes associated with delivering the topic. Focusing on teachers' experiences provides valuable insights that can inform the development of effective RSE practices and support mechanisms. Therefore, this study seeks to understand the experiences of teachers to first understand how the relatively new RSE guidance is being applied in their practice, which will ultimately support future research into the experiences and views of CYPwLD. In line with the aims and aforementioned gaps in the literature, the following research question was constructed:

'What is it like for school staff to deliver RSE for CYPwLD within secondary specialist provisions?'

3.3. Research Paradigms

The process of data collection and interpretation is inherently influenced by the researcher's worldview, which is intrinsically linked to their philosophical orientation (Smith et al., 2022). Thus, it is essential to acknowledge and understand one's worldview and its potential impact on methodological decisions throughout the research process (Cohen et al., 2007). Within this subsection, the researcher's ontological and epistemological positioning will be outlined to provide the contextual framework that informs this study's methodology. This will not only allow academic

transparency, but also aims to contextualise the study and subsequent findings within an epistemological and ontological framework.

3.3.1. *Ontology*

Ontology is as an intellectual framework that considers the fundamental nature of reality and existence, questioning the nature of phenomena and the underlying structures that shape experiences (Crotty, 1998). It involves making key decisions about what constitutes reality, including the nature of mental processes, how individuals perceive and interact with their environment, and the underlying structures that shape these experiences (Ormston et al., 2014).

Ontological perspectives exist along a continuum that spans from realism to relativism, containing various perspectives on the nature of reality (Willig, 2013). Realism, positioned at one end of the continuum, advocates for an objective and independent reality that exists independently of individual perception (Willig, 2013). On the other end of the continuum is relativism, which recognises the existence of multiple subjective realities and highlights the influence of individual perspectives and experiences in shaping reality. There is an acknowledgment that reality is constructed and interpreted by individuals based on their unique cognitive processes, cultural backgrounds, and individual experiences (Willig, 2013). Critical realism seeks to bridge the gap between realism and relativism. It acknowledges an objective reality that exists independently of our perceptions, but it recognises that our understanding of this reality is shaped by our subjective interpretations (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006). Critical realism posits that while there is a real, external world,

our knowledge of it is mediated through our social and cultural contexts, and it emphasises the importance of understanding the underlying structures and mechanisms that influence our perceptions of reality (Bhaskar & Danermark, 2006).

Thus, a realist perspective would assume that the experiences of secondary school teachers, their practices, and the effectiveness of RSE delivery can be objectively measured and understood. In this way, the focus would be on uncovering these universal truths, assuming that they exist independently of individual perspectives, teaching styles, or contextual factors. However, this approach risks oversimplifying the complex and subjective nature of teaching experiences, potentially overlooking the diverse and context-dependent realities inherent in the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD. Consequently, this study rejects a realist stance. While critical realism's dual consideration of objective reality and subjective interpretations adds complexity to ontological assumptions, the emphasis on uncovering underlying structures and mechanism and an unintended bias toward objectivity does not align with the study's immediate focus on capturing lived experiences and providing practical insights.

Given the diverse nature of teaching experiences, especially in the context of RSE for CYPwLD, this research adopts a relativist paradigm. It recognises that the interpretation and implementation of RSE is shaped by individual perspectives, teaching philosophies, and contextual factors. In doing so, this study acknowledges the absence of a singular truth in the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD. Instead, it recognises that individuals will uphold multiple realities, each of which is socially constructed and mediated through unique experiences.

3.3.2. Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the assumptions guiding our understanding of knowledge itself. It considers how knowledge is defined and the mechanisms through which it can be acquired (Willig, 2013). As with ontological positions, epistemological positions also exist along a continuum with positivism at one end and interpretivism at the other. Positivism assumes that knowledge is objective, hard and tangible, thus is observable, and as such we can study phenomena through the use of the scientific method (Ormston et al., 2014). Thus, quantitative methodologies, which are statistical, measurable and reliable are appropriate for uncovering knowledge. On the other hand, interpretivism assumes that facts are not distinct, and opposingly considers the relationship between the social world and the researcher. It assumes that the scientific method is not appropriate for uncovering knowledge, which is subjective, personal and unique (Ormston et al., 2014). As a result, the position places value on qualitative methodologies, uncovering knowledge through exploring individual subjective experience. Within this perspective, constructionism places an emphasis on understanding how groups or societies influence social phenomena where constructivism places emphasis on understanding the viewpoint of an individual observer, and how our individual constructs shape phenomena (Crotty, 1998; Ratner, 2008).

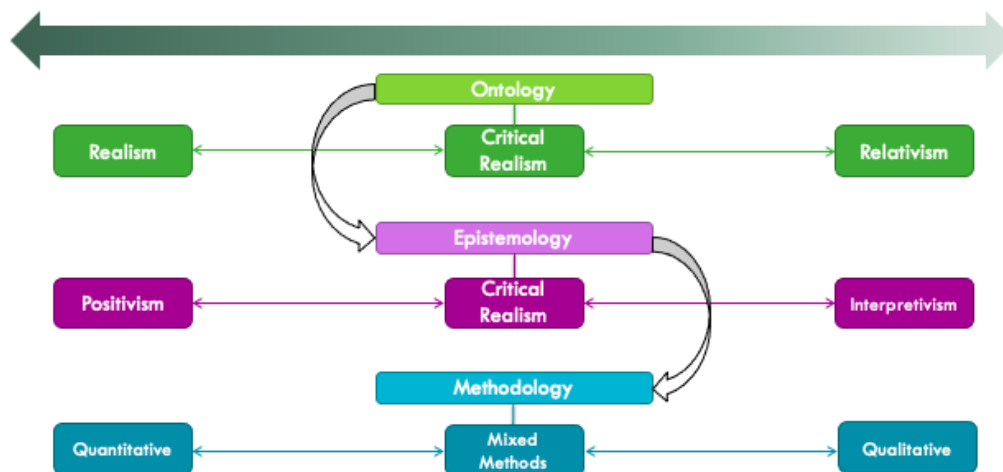
By opting for a constructivist epistemology, this research recognises that the interpretation and implementation of RSE are complex processes influenced by teachers' subjective perspectives, teaching styles, and the diverse needs of students with LD. Consequently, the approach is better suited for unveiling the dynamic

realities teachers may experience in delivering RSE for CYPwLD, offering a more holistic understanding of teaching experiences.

Figure 1 illustrates the dynamic ontological and epistemological continuum, providing a visual representation of the diverse perspectives that underpin the study's philosophical framework.

Figure 1.

Mapping the ontological and epistemological continuum



3.4. Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

Grounded in phenomenology and hermeneutics, IPA seeks to unravel the meanings and subjective interpretations embedded within individual narratives. It is a qualitative approach which prioritises the depth and richness of participants' lived experiences, aiming to go beyond surface-level insights and explore the layers of meaning that contribute to an understanding of how individuals make sense of their experiences (Smith et al., 2022).

3.4.1. Phenomenology

Phenomenology is concerned with the “study of experience” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 7), with a core focus centred around understanding the aspects of experience that hold significance for individuals and collectively constitute our lived world (Smith et al., 2022). The work of philosophers such as Husserl, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, and Sartre have made significant contributions to the development of phenomenology (Smith et al., 2022).

Husserl’s (1927) philosophy focused on exploring the structures of human experience, prioritising individual consciousness and how these internal processes are central in shaping our understanding of reality. Heidegger (1927) introduced a hermeneutic dimension to phenomenology, highlighting that humans are not isolated beings but that we are interconnected with our environment and with each other, thus emphasising the dynamic and relational nature of human experience. Merleau-Ponty (1962) emphasised the embodied nature of human experience, arguing that our bodily engagement with the environment is key to the process of comprehending our surroundings and subsequently attributing meaning to them. Finally, Sartre (1948) believed that people are not born with a predetermined purpose or essence; rather, they define themselves through their actions and decisions. Sartre emphasised the importance of personal freedom and responsibility in shaping an individual’s identity and outlook on life.

Taken together, these philosophical underpinnings emphasise the importance of capturing lived experiences, ranging from the influence of individual consciousness to the embodied nature of perception and the importance of personal freedom. IPA,

informed by these philosophies, seeks to understand the lived experiences of individuals, aiming to explore the underlying meanings that shape interpretations of the world and to capture the complexity of individual lived realities (Smith et al., 2022).

3.4.2. Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is a philosophical discipline centred around the interpretation and understanding of texts, symbols, and experiences. Developed from the work of philosophers such as Schleiermacher (1998), Heidegger (1927) and Gadamer (1960), hermeneutics emphasises the context-dependent nature of interpretation and the 'fusion of horizons' between the interpreter and the phenomenon being interpreted (Gadamer, 1960; Smith et al., 2022).

In understanding the process of analysis within IPA, it's crucial to understand the concept of the hermeneutic circle, which considers the dynamic relationship between the whole and its parts. As articulated by Smith et al. (2022), "To understand any given part, you look to the whole; to understand the whole, you look to the parts" (p. 22). This principle emphasises the interconnectedness of the part and whole, reflecting the reciprocal relationship between understanding the important elements of an experience which exist within a meaningful whole (Davidsen, 2013). In this way, IPA involves an iterative approach where researchers must immerse themselves in the data, continually discerning meaning across various levels that evolve over time (Smith et al., 2022).

Double hermeneutics is a key concept within IPA, which refers to the dual process of interpretation central to the approach (Smith et al., 2022). On one level, researchers engage in the interpretation of participants' narratives, seeking to understand the meanings and themes embedded within their accounts. This represents the first level of interpretation, where researchers analyse and make sense of the data collected (Smith et al., 2022). However, double hermeneutics also involves a second level of interpretation, where researchers reflect on their own interpretations and consider how their preconceptions, biases, and theoretical frameworks may have influenced their understanding of participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2022). This reflexivity is central to IPA, as researchers critically examine their own assumptions, biases, and preconceptions that may influence their interpretation of participants' experiences (Smith et al., 2022).

3.4.3. Ideography

Ideography focuses on the analysis of unique and individual phenomena, rather than seeking generalisable patterns across a given population (Smith et al., 2022). It emphasises the richness and complexity of individual experiences, aiming to capture the depth and uniqueness of each experience (Smith et al., 2022).

IPA prioritises the in-depth exploration of the meanings individuals attribute to their experiences, aiming to understand the unique context and personal significance of each participant's narrative (Smith et al., 2022). Rather than aiming for broad generalisations or statistical trends, IPA seeks to uncover the rich meanings embedded within individuals' lived experiences (Smith et al., 2022). It emphasises

the detailed analysis of individual cases, focusing on the idiosyncratic aspects of each participant's story while also identifying common themes and patterns across cases (Smith et al., 2022).

3.5. Consideration of Alternative Methodologies

During the research process, various methodologies besides IPA were considered. Given the researcher's ontological and epistemological stance, alongside the exploratory nature of the study, this solely consisted of alternative qualitative methodologies.

Discourse analysis was initially considered as a potential methodology, focusing on language use within social contexts and the power dynamics inherent in communication (Parker, 1992). While this could offer insights into how RSE is discussed and constructed within specialist provisions, it has been criticised for the 'lack of a person' (Langdrige, 2004, p. 345), focusing on discourse alone and consequently not addressing issues related to subjectivity (Willig, 2013). Thus, the approach may lack depth in understanding individual experiences of school staff delivering RSE for CYPwLD, potentially overlooking the complexity of participants' realities. Additionally, its findings may have limited direct applicability to practical interventions or improvements in RSE delivery for CYPwLD within specialist provisions.

Grounded theory was also considered as a potential methodology. However, its systematic approach to theory generation from qualitative data may not be the most

appropriate for exploring the subjective experiences of school staff delivering RSE for CYPwLD within specialist provisions. In research contexts focusing on understanding experience, grounded theory tends to function more as a method of systematic categorisation (Willig, 2013). While this approach can develop understanding of the structure of participants' experiences', this tends to create a more descriptive picture rather than leading to the development of theory (Willig, 2013). Thus it may be argued that the approach does not align well to research focusing on experience, which may be considered better suited to phenomenological approaches (Willig, 2013).

3.6. Research Design

This study utilised a qualitative methodology to explore teachers experiences of delivering RSE for CYPwLD. A qualitative approach was chosen for its ability to obtain in-depth explanations that go beyond surface-level insights (Edwards & Holland, 2020), essential in thoroughly exploring the depths of teachers lived experiences. Use of quantitative methods may have risked overlooking the complex details, personal reflections, and diverse perspectives within these experiences.

3.6.1 Participants and Recruitment

In line with the influence of ideography on IPA, the approach focuses on the *particular*, utilising small and purposefully selected samples (Smith et al., 2022). In fact, Smith et al. (2022) have been increasingly advocating for single case studies within IPA to fully embrace its ideographic essence. Nonetheless, Smith et al. (2022)

generally suggest a range of approximately 3-10 participants, based on the study's individual circumstances. However, it is emphasised that “there is no right answer to the question of sample size” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 46), rather the sample size will likely be related to factors such as the richness of the data and organisational constraints.

For this thesis, the researcher conducted interviews with four participants. Initially, attempts were made to recruit a larger sample, with an additional five individuals expressing interest in the study. However, all five subsequently withdrew from participation. While three of them did not provide reasons for their withdrawal, two individuals explained that the demands of their roles in schools left them with insufficient time and mental capacity to participate.

A purposive sampling method was employed for the research, utilising both volunteer and opportunity sampling techniques. The sample population for the study consisted of teachers who have delivered RSE since September 2020 within secondary specialist provisions in England for CYPwLD. Participants were recruited through advertisements (see appendix K) posted in social media groups, emails sent to schools, and emails to local authority Educational Psychology Services across England. Volunteers who were then deemed to meet the inclusion criteria (see table 5) were then invited for interviews on a first-come, first-served basis. It was clarified in the advertisement that expressing interest did not guarantee recruitment.

This shared experience among participants aimed to result in a relatively homogenous group (Smith et al., 2022). Although participants shared a similar

experience in teaching RSE for CYPwLD, there were differences in their roles within schools, potentially affecting the homogeneity of their experiences. Nonetheless, this range of roles does support an exploration of individual subjective experiences in relation the research question, aligning with an IPA methodology.

Table 5.

Participant inclusion and exclusion criteria

Inclusion criteria	Exclusion criteria
Teachers who have delivered RSE for CYPwLD within secondary specialist provisions.	Teachers working within mainstream, primary or nursery settings.
Teachers who have delivered RSE for CYPwLD since September 2020.	Teachers who have not held a role in delivering RSE for CYPwLD (e.g. admin staff).
	Teachers working in secondary specialist provisions who have delivered RSE for CYPwLD solely prior to September 2020.

The participants' experiences with CYPwLD were also often intertwined with comorbid conditions such as ASC or other developmental conditions, which was frequently mentioned during interviews. Given the nature of specialist settings in England, which typically support children with a diverse range of needs (Scope,

2024), it was believed that these experiences would likely be more reflective of the experiences of special school teachers in England. However, teachers were asked to reflect more specifically on their experiences in relation to the learning needs of the children, where possible. Additionally, all of the participants shared that their experiences of supporting secondary age students were in the context of working in an all-through school (i.e. early years to post-16). Although participants were asked to reflect on specifically on their experiences of supporting secondary age children for the purposes of the study, it is likely that the context of working in an all-through school will have shaped their experience in some ways.

3.6.2. Data Collection

The research utilised unstructured interviews as the method of data collection. This method was selected in an attempt to implement the ontological and epistemological position of the research to the fullest extent, allowing the interaction to be led by the participant and not structured around topics or assumptions led by the researcher (Smith et al., 2022), thereby reducing the risk of merely reflecting topics considered within an interview schedule and allowing for deeper exploration of “unanticipated and unexpected findings” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 67). Ratner (2008) suggests that individuals' realities are inherently "unknowable," advocating for a co-constructive approach in research; unstructured interviews facilitate this process by allowing for open-ended dialogue, enabling researchers to develop a deeper understanding of participants' lived experience. This method requires reflexivity, acknowledging the researcher's influence on interpretation (see section 3.7). Therefore, unstructured

interviews are well-suited for exploring the complexity and richness of participants' experiences.

The interviews followed a single core interview question, resembling the research question: that is, "*Please tell me about your experience of delivering RSE for CYPwLD?*" with the remainder of the interview dependent on participant responses. All subsequent questions aimed to remain open ended, or otherwise involved reflecting back, clarifying, and validating what the participant had previously shared to facilitate further thought and reflection on the topic of discussion (Lavee & Itzchakov, 2023).

Participants took part in an online video interview via Zoom which was audio recorded to allow for transcription. Interviews ranged from 40-60 minutes in length. The choice of online interviews was considered most appropriate as the study aimed to obtain a sample representative of special school teachers delivering RSE across England. This approach aimed to mitigate potential travel-related barriers, a particularly relevant consideration given the broader temporal context marked by ongoing teacher strikes over low pay (Roberts, 2023). A recent survey revealing that 77% of teachers in special schools and pupil referral units (PRUs) expressed disagreement with the statement 'My pay is fair, given my skills, qualifications, and workload' (National Education Union, 2023). In light of these circumstances, expecting teachers to bear travel costs was deemed insensitive and impractical. Regarding the potential impact of online interviewing, recent research conducted in the light of the pandemic's increase in virtual interactions suggests that, having become more familiar to virtual platforms, participants perceive remote interviews as

more comfortable than their more traditional face-to-face counterparts (Wahl-Jorgensen, 2021). To ensure their comfort, participants were informed that they were able to take breaks as and when necessary.

Following each interview, the researcher transcribed the audio recording to generate verbatim transcripts for subsequent analysis. To ensure precision, the audio recordings were carefully reviewed on multiple occasions alongside the transcripts. It is considered unnecessary to transcribe information which will not be analysed (O'Connell & Kowal, 1995), and as such the transcription involved a semantic record. This record included notes on noteworthy non-verbal expressions, such as laughter (*laughs*), and significant pauses or hesitations (*pause*). Additionally, words spoken with particular emphasis were underlined (Smith et al., 2022).

3.7. Reflexivity

In qualitative research, particularly within the framework of IPA, researcher reflexivity is of key importance in ensuring the integrity and trustworthiness of the study (Finlay, 2002). IPA aims to delve into participants' subjective experiences, requiring researchers to pay careful consideration to the process of data collection, selection and interpretation with a critical awareness of their own biases and assumptions (Finlay, 2002).

The concept of 'bracketing' in qualitative research involves researchers engaging in self-reflection to identify and set aside their preconceptions and biases related to the research topic (Tufford & Newman, 2012). This process becomes particularly crucial

given the unstructured nature of the interviews. By actively engaging in reflexivity, researchers can mitigate the risk of imposing their own perspectives onto the data, thereby preserving the authenticity of participants' narratives and allowing readers the autonomy to draw their own interpretations (Tufford & Newman, 2012).

Reflexivity was integrated throughout the entirety of the project, facilitated by the use of a reflective research diary, regular supervisory sessions, and constructive peer feedback. Furthermore, Haynes (2012) proposes that researchers contemplate the following aspects:

1. "What is the motivation for undertaking this research?"
2. What underlying assumptions I am bringing to it?
3. How am I connected to the research, theoretically, experientially, emotionally?

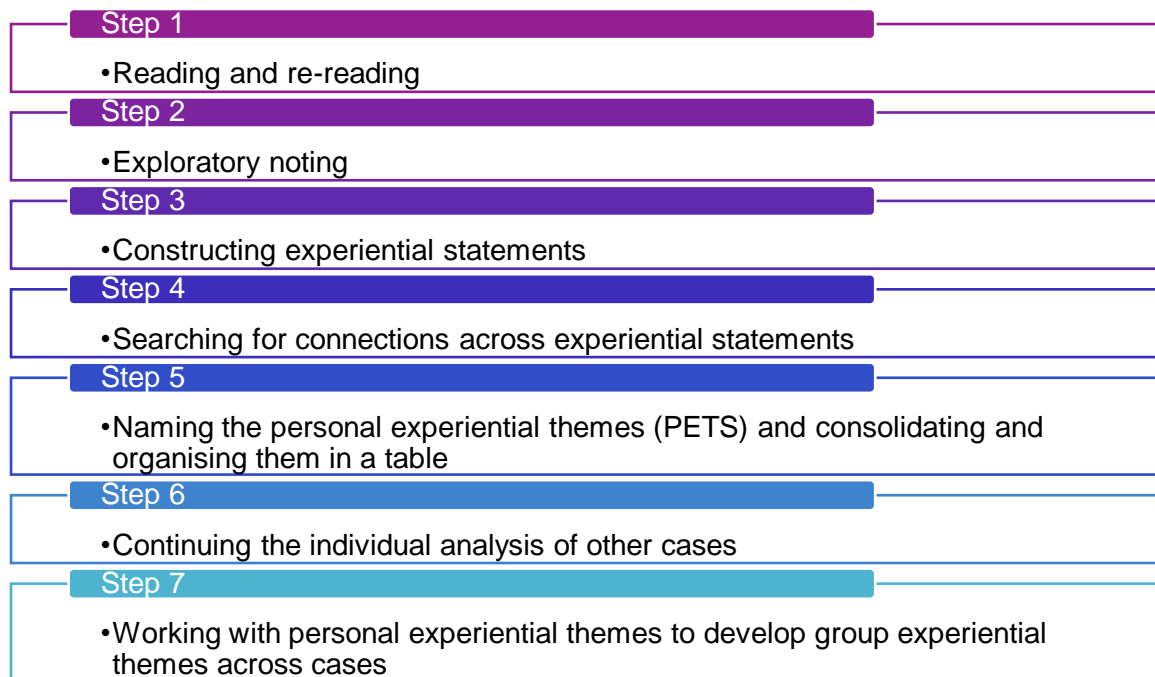
And what effect will this have on my approach?" (Haynes, 2012, p. 78)

Initially, I perceived the research as lacking personal significance, viewing it more as an outcome of discussions with schools and colleagues during my placement as a Trainee Educational Psychologist. However, upon reflection, I recalled instances from my past role where I witnessed children with additional needs being excluded from RSE lessons, which had brought issues of social justice and human rights into the forefront of my mind at the time and as such I do feel very passionately about the subject. Moreover, after reviewing the guidance and engaging with schools, I held a negative outlook on the expectations placed on schools, given the scarcity of information and support provided. These feelings were heightened by the ongoing challenges faced by education professionals, stemming from what I perceive as a

lack of understanding from government bodies regarding what it is *like* to work in any form of education in the current climate. Consequently, during the project, I found myself deeply resonating with the participants' discussions, necessitating a considerable effort to maintain objectivity. Reflecting on the interview data, I acknowledge the possibility that my own assumptions may have influenced the process. Despite employing reflexive techniques, I do recognise that I may have been somewhat naive regarding the extent of my biases, as my connection to the project was not immediately apparent.

3.8. Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis process adhered to the guidelines outlined by Smith et al. (2022), which builds upon the six-step framework introduced in their earlier publication (Smith et al., 2009). The steps outlined in Figure 2 were sequentially followed, although it's important to note that Smith et al. (2022) emphasise the flexibility of these steps, cautioning against viewing them as rigid steps in a predetermined process. Subsequently, the forthcoming section will detail the application of each step in the analysis process.

Figure 2.*IPA data analysis process***3.8.1. Step 1: Reading and Re-reading**

In the initial phase of the analysis process, the researcher immersed themselves in the interview transcripts to fully engage with the participants' narratives. This iterative process involved multiple readings to develop initial impressions and identify recurring themes and patterns. Following the advice of Smith et al. (2022), the researcher also listened to the audio recordings while reviewing the transcripts, allowing for additional depth of meaning provided by the participants' voices, such as tone and expression, to enhance the analysis. This approach not only enriched the reading experience but also contributed to the accuracy of the transcription.

Subsequently, the transcribed data was organised in a Microsoft Word document, with columns created to separate experiential statements on the left and exploratory notes on the right, facilitating data management and analysis (see appendix L).

3.8.2. Step 2: Exploratory Noting

As detailed by Smith et al. (2022), during the exploratory noting phase of IPA the interview transcripts are annotated to capture any interesting or significant aspects of participants' dialogue. This process enables researchers to begin identifying how participants articulate and conceptualise various issues and aspects of their experiences. Notably, stages 1 and 2 of IPA can be considered to occur simultaneously, with researchers making notes as they read and re-read the transcripts. Smith et al. (2022) further emphasise that there are no rigid guidelines dictating what should be commented upon, allowing researchers to capture a wide range of notes and comments. Exploratory noting, as categorised by Smith et al. (2022), can be categorised into three types, that is: exploratory, linguistic, and conceptual notes, each contributing to different levels of interpretation. Exploratory notes are relatively descriptive and relate directly to participants' statements, whereas linguistic notes focus more on the specific use of language, and conceptual notes involve a more analytical approach, wherein researchers actively question the data. The exploratory notes were made coded according to the three areas and recorded on the right hand side of the transcript. These coded exploratory notes can be found in the annotated transcripts provided in appendix L.

3.8.3. Step 3: Constructing Experiential Statements

Experiential statements are termed as such because they are essentially tied to the participants' *experiences*. During the phase of constructing experiential statements, the data collected during the exploratory noting phase was refined to develop clear and insightful phrases that effectively captured participants' experiences, while also

incorporating the researcher's interpretation (Smith et al., 2022). This stage aimed to transform the initial "loose and open" exploratory notes into more refined statements that accurately capture and convey understanding (Smith et al., 2022, p. 87). The experiential statements were generated and annotated on the left side of the transcript, which can be found in appendix L.

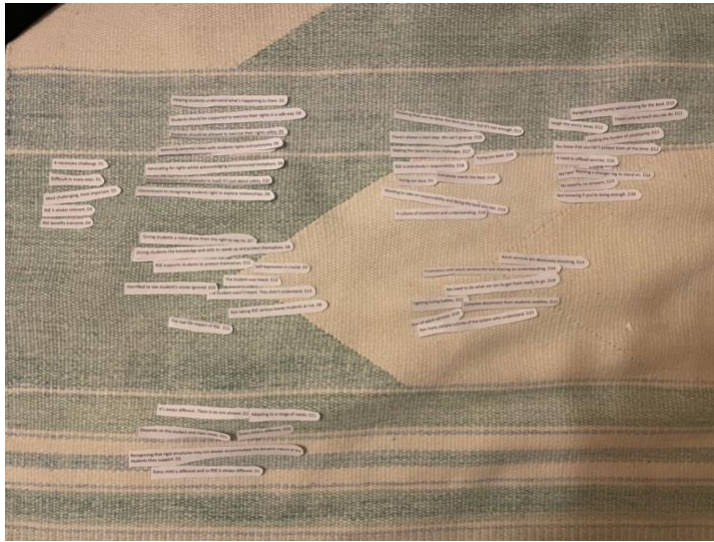
3.8.4. Step 4: Searching for Connections Across Experiential Statements

During this phase, the researcher engaged in an analysis of the previously identified experiential statements to identify patterns, similarities, and connections among them (Smith et al., 2022). This involved searching for connections between each of the experiential statements to identify potential clusters within each participants' narrative based on shared characteristics or underlying meanings (Smith et al., 2022).

The experiential statements were printed out and arranged randomly on the floor. Statements that were related in some way were grouped together, forming clusters. Duplicate statements were stacked on top of one another and some were discarded, largely due to their lack of perceived relevance to the research question. The clustered statements were then transferred onto a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet, along with the corresponding original quotes from the interview transcripts.

Figure 3.

Photograph illustrating the process of creating PETS



3.8.5. Step 5: Naming the Personal Experiential Themes (PETS) and Consolidating and Organising Them

During this phase, the researcher began naming the Personal Experiential Themes (PETS) derived from the clustered experiential statements (Smith et al., 2022). Once named, these themes were combined, divided into subthemes, and organised in a table format to provide a structured overview of the emergent findings. Each theme was described concisely, accompanied by illustrative quotes from the interview transcripts to provide context and support for the interpretation. Each participant's PETS together with aligning experiential statements and quotes can be found in appendix M.

3.8.6. Step 6: Continuing the Analysis of Other Individual Cases

The researcher then continued the analysis by repeating the above steps in order to identify PETs for each individual participant. Smith et al. (2022) emphasised the importance of remaining true to the ideographic nature of IPA during this phase, cautioning against “simply reproducing ideas” from previous cases (Smith et al., 2022, p. 99). Consequently, the practice of ‘bracketing off’ became more crucial, with the researcher additionally striving to take considerable breaks between each case analysis to further prevent the carryover of prior perspectives. This approach aimed to facilitate a more rigorous and unbiased examination of each participant's experiences.

3.8.7. Step 7: Working with PETs to Develop Group Experiential Themes (GETs) Across Cases

For the final step, the PETs were synthesised and analysed in order to identify areas of similarity and difference, ultimately resulting in the development of Group Experiential Themes (GETs) across cases. Smith et al. (2022) stress the importance of maintaining sensitivity to the nuances of each participant's experiences while also identifying overarching patterns that emerge across individual cases. This iterative process of comparison and synthesis allowed the researcher to refine the diverse range of PETS into a smaller set of GETs that capture the collective essence of participants' experiences.

Figure 4.

Photograph illustrating the process of organising PETs into GETs



3.9. Research Quality

Qualitative research has encountered some scrutiny when it comes to establishing research quality, partially because it emerged more recently compared to quantitative research meaning that there is relatively less well-established criteria for assessing the quality of qualitative studies (Yardley, 2000). Moreover, the subjective and interpretive nature of qualitative approaches has intensified this scrutiny.

Traditional criteria, which aim to achieve 'objective knowledge' through elements such as large representative samples, balanced design, and reliable measures, are simply not applicable to qualitative research (Yardley, 2000, 2017).

There has, however, been a growing recognition of the need for robust evaluation frameworks tailored to assess the quality of qualitative research. Therefore, in this study, the researcher incorporated established criteria to evaluate the rigour of the analysis conducted. Yardley's (2000) characteristics of good (qualitative) research

offer a comprehensive framework ensuring a thorough assessment of the research's trustworthiness. Additionally, Nizza et al.'s (2021) criteria for excellence in IPA provide specific guidelines tailored to the unique goals and characteristics of IPA studies. By integrating these criteria into the evaluation of the research quality, the researcher aims to provide a comprehensive picture.

3.9.1. Yardley's (2000) Characteristics of Good (Qualitative) Research

Yardley (2000, p. 219) categorises the validity of qualitative research into distinct categories which are presented in table 6. These categories will be examined in relation to the present study.

Table 6.

Yardley's (2000) characteristics of good (qualitative) research

Essential qualities	Examples
Sensitivity to context	Theoretical; relevant literature; empirical data; sociocultural setting; participants perspectives; ethical issues.
Commitment and rigour	In-depth engagement with topic; methodological competence/skill; thorough data collection; depth/breadth of analysis.
Transparency and coherence	Clarity and power of description/argument; transparent

	methods and data presentation; fit between theory and method; reflexivity.
Impact and importance	Theoretical (enriching understanding); socio-cultural; practical (for community, policy makers, health workers).

Note. Adapted from “Dilemmas in qualitative health research.” by L. Yardley, 2000, *Psychology & Health*, 15(2), 215-228.

3.9.1.1. Sensitivity to Context

Being sensitive to context in qualitative research involves understanding and acknowledging the various factors that shape the research process and participants' experiences, as Yardley (2000) explains. This involves considering the theoretical frameworks and previous research informing the topic, as well as recognising the broader sociocultural, linguistic, and historical influences on participants' perspectives and actions. Furthermore, sensitivity to context involves remaining mindful of the dynamics between researchers and participants, including power dynamics and ethical considerations. By taking these contextual factors into account, researchers can interpret data more effectively, ensure that participant voices are heard and respected, and uphold ethical standards throughout the research journey.

In conducting this study, an unstructured interview approach was adopted to allow the teachers the freedom to share their experiences and perspectives openly. By utilising this interviewing style, participants were encouraged to discuss their experiences of delivering RSE to CYPwLD within the specific context of secondary

specialist provisions. Throughout the interviews, probing questions were used to delve deeper into the contextual factors influencing participants' perceptions and practices. This approach facilitated an exploration of the situational dynamics, institutional norms, and resource constraints that shaped the delivery of RSE in these settings.

Additionally, a comprehensive literature review was conducted (see Chapter 2), which encompassed studies investigating RSE practices, perspectives, and attitudes specific to CYPwLD. By synthesising existing knowledge, the researcher gained insights into the theoretical frameworks, empirical findings, and practical considerations shaping the current context of RSE delivery for CYPwLD.

In presenting the study findings (see Chapter 4), particular attention was given to incorporating participant perspectives and voices. Direct quotes from the interviews with teachers were included within the narrative to illustrate the richness of their experiences in their own words.

3.9.1.2. Commitment and Rigour

In qualitative research, commitment involves deeply engaging with the research topic and one's personal experiences related to it, as described by Yardley (2000). This includes developing expertise in research methods and thoroughly immersing oneself in the data. Rigour, on the other hand, is related to the thoroughness of data collection and analysis. It involves ensuring completeness in interpretation and addressing any complexity in the data. This might involve using different levels of

analysis and using triangulation to gain a comprehensive understanding of the research topic.

In this study, the researcher demonstrated commitment to the research topic by dedicating significant time and effort to thoroughly understanding the complexities of delivering RSE for children CYPwLD within secondary specialist provisions. This involved conducting an extensive literature review (see Chapter 2) and engaging with EPs who had held a role in supporting specialist provisions with RSE to gain a comprehensive understanding of the topic.

The researcher also aimed to demonstrate rigour by developing proficiency in IPA and unstructured interviews. This included reading around IPA interviewing and utilising regular supervision to practicing interview techniques.

3.9.1.3. Transparency and Coherence

In qualitative research, transparency and coherence are essential aspects of presenting findings, as outlined by Yardley (2000). Transparency refers to the clarity and strength of the narrative, ensuring that readers can easily understand and engage with the research findings. Coherence, on the other hand, involves aligning the research question, philosophical perspective, and methodological approach to create a cohesive argument. Achieving transparency requires researchers to provide detailed descriptions of the data collection and analysis processes, including coding and the presentation of quotations to illustrate patterns. Additionally, researchers must disclose any relevant aspects of the research process, including reflexivity, to enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the study.

In this study, the researcher aimed to present the findings in a clear and convincing manner. This involved organising findings through PETS and GETS, providing illustrative quotes or from interviews to support key points, and ensuring that the narrative effectively communicated the significance of the research findings in addressing the research question.

Moreover, reflexivity was upheld throughout the research process to acknowledge and address potential biases and assumptions. As the researcher, I continuously reflected on my own background, perspectives, and preconceptions about RSE delivery for CYPwLD in secondary specialist provisions (see section 3.7). By engaging in this critical self-awareness, transparency was ensured in relation to the potential influence of my positionality on data interpretation. This reflexive stance enhanced the credibility and trustworthiness of the study findings, contributing to a more robust understanding of the context under investigation.

3.9.1.4. Impact and Importance

Finally, Yardley (2000) emphasises that ultimately the influence and utility of research is key when considering its overarching quality. While theoretical significance often takes priority, practical implications and socio-cultural impacts are equally important. After all, what purpose does research serve if it doesn't benefit anyone? By shedding light on new perspectives and influencing societal norms, research can drive positive change and progress. Qualitative research, particularly due to its close connection with real-world contexts, has a unique advantage in its potential for practical application. Evaluating research in terms of its impact and

importance involves consideration of its theoretical innovation, practical relevance, and socio-cultural implications, ultimately assessing its contribution to knowledge and societal development.

The impact and importance of this research is clearly outlined throughout this thesis, in particular within the introduction, literature review and discussion chapters. With the recent mandate of compulsory RSE within specialist provisions, teachers are confronted with the complexities of integrating this curriculum into their practice. This underscores the pressing need for further investigation in this domain. Positioned within a key timeframe, this thesis fills a notable gap in existing research by addressing an area that has yet to be explored, aiming to offer practical insights and support for individuals navigating this developing reality.

3.9.2. *Nizza et al.'s (2021) Markers of High Quality IPA*

This research also aimed to adhere to the markers of high-quality IPA research identified by Nizza et al. (2021) which are outlined below. These markers served as key guidelines throughout the project, but especially in ensuring thoroughness and depth in analysing participant narratives within the unique context of RSE for CYPwLD. Given their intended purpose of evaluating IPA research, further reflection on these markers in the discussion chapter (see chapter 5) offers insight into the overall quality of the research in relation to standards specific to IPA.

3.9.2.1. Constructing a Compelling Unfolding Narrative

Nizza et al. (2021) explain that findings should blend participant quotes, descriptive passages, and analytical interpretations to create a coherent and engaging storyline. The narrative should flow seamlessly, smoothly transitioning from one idea to the next, keeping the reader intrigued throughout and effectively communicating the complexity of the research findings.

3.9.2.2. Developing a Vigorous Experiential and/or Existential Account

As highlighted by Nizza et al. (2021), a high-quality IPA paper will explicitly engage with the experiential and existential elements of participants' narratives, shedding light on their sense-making efforts and the impact of their experiences on their existential world. This involves going beyond the surface-level description of events to uncover existential themes. Through thoughtful analysis and interpretation, researchers may explore the existential significance within participants' narratives, adding richness and depth to the findings.

3.9.2.3. Close Analytic Reading of Participants Words.

IPA researchers demonstrate their commitment to interpretation and idiographic depth by engaging in a thorough analysis of participant quotes (Nizza et al., 2021). Instead of simply presenting quotes at face value, researchers explore their significance, considering complexities in language, tone, and metaphor to reveal layers of meaning. This method allows researchers to construct an interpretation that captures the complexity of participant experiences, reflecting IPA's interpretive

approach that bridges the language used by participants with the broader context of the data. This approach facilitates a cohesive interpretation that captures the richness of participant experiences, reflecting IPA's hermeneutic process.

3.9.2.4. Attending to Convergence and Divergence

According to Nizza et al. (2021), exploring both similarities and differences in participants' experiences to highlight commonalities and unique aspects. This process involves hermeneutic cycling between individual accounts and the broader context, facilitating understanding of how different individuals interpret and understand similar experiences based on their distinct perspectives and contexts/backgrounds.

3.10. Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the research was obtained from the Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC; see appendix F). Following the initial submission, the ethical committee requested minor amendments to the TREC application, as outlined in appendix G, which were thoroughly examined and addressed (see appendix H). Additionally, the British Psychological Society (BPS) Code of Ethics and Conduct (BPS, 2021) and BPS Code of Human Research Ethics (Oates, 2021) were considered when planning and conducting this study. Further exploration of such ethical considerations are discussed below.

3.10.1. Informed Consent and Right to Withdraw

Participants were first given a detailed information sheet (see appendix I) outlining the research objectives, procedures, and confidentiality issues, allowing them to review the information at their own pace and ensuring a participant-led cooling-off period. Subsequently, participants were provided with a written consent form (see appendix J), allowing them to make an informed decision about their involvement before scheduling interview dates. Throughout the process, participants were assured of their right to withdraw from the study at any time without facing consequences. They were reminded of this right both before and after the interview, with a clear timeframe of two weeks provided for withdrawal if desired.

3.10.2. Privacy and Confidentiality

Confidentiality measures were implemented to safeguard participants' identities throughout the research process. All data was anonymised using a pseudonym chosen with the participant to ensure participant privacy. It was acknowledged, however, that complete anonymity might be challenging given the study's small sample size and relatively niche participant group. Therefore, only essential demographic information such as geographical location and role within the school were collected to ensure anonymity to the fullest extent possible.

Interviews were audio-recorded solely for the purpose of data analysis and were not used for any other purposes. Transcriptions of the interviews were anonymised using participants selected pseudonym which was additionally used within the write up to make the data more personable. Any identifiable information (e.g. school or local

authority name) was omitted from the transcript using square brackets (e.g. [school name]).

Data handling followed the Tavistock and Portman Trust's data protection policy. Consent forms, interview recordings, and any identifiable information were securely stored separately from interview transcripts in password-protected files on the researcher's computer. These files will be destroyed after 10 years in line with the UK Research Council's guidance.

Participants were assured that their information would only be shared if it indicated a serious risk of harm to themselves or others, following established local safeguarding procedures.

Participants were also informed that the research would be disseminated in the form of a written thesis, with potential further dissemination through additional means such as a journal publication or conference presentation.

3.10.3. Debriefing and Protection From Harm

Following each interview, an additional 30 minutes was allocated for debriefing, allowing participants to reflect on their experience and discuss any emotions or concerns they may have had during the interview process. The researcher attentively listened to participants' reflections and provided support and validation as needed. If participants indicated distress or expressed a need for further support, information about external organisations offering assistance was offered.

Education Support offers confidential support and counselling tailored to individuals in the education sector (Education Support, 2023a). Where necessary, participants were provided with contact details for Education Support and encouraged to reach out if they required any additional support following their participation.

Participants were also provided with the researcher's contact details and encouraged to reach out should they hold any inquiries or concerns, providing the opportunity for further support should any retrospective difficulties arise.

To ensure the protection of the CYP being supported by the participants, all participants were asked to specify their employing Local Authority in the consent form to facilitate safeguarding procedures in the event of disclosures relating to professional misconduct or unlawful practices, prior to anonymisation of the data.

Chapter 4 – Findings

4.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter will explore participants' accounts of delivering RSE for CYPwLD within secondary specialist provisions to provide insight into their experiences of teaching the subject since it became compulsory in 2020. The chapter aims to explore the following research question:

"What is it like for school staff to deliver RSE for CYPwLD within secondary specialist provisions?"

Initially, the chapter delves into each participants PETs, providing insight into the specific perspectives and lived experiences that characterise the individual dimension of the study. To support the thematic discussions and enhance clarity, illustrative quotes for each participants PETs have been placed in Appendix M. Following an overview of the PETs, the findings then explore the GETs, which consider elements of shared and distinct experiences across participants using illustrative quotes.

To demonstrate transparency of the researcher's interpretations and maintain the phenomenological essence of IPA, direct quotes from the participants will be included. Additionally, typographic features, as outlined in Table 7, will be utilised to ease readability and provide additional information. Page numbers accompanying each quote will correspond to the page numbers of individual interview transcripts provided in appendix L.

Table 7.*Typographical features*

Typographical Feature	Description
<i>(pause)</i>	A pause in speech
[...]	Quotation has been cut
-	An interruption
[]	Contextual information (e.g. [home circumstance disruption]) or editorial interpolation
()	Non-verbal communication (e.g. <i>(laughs)</i> or <i>(sighs)</i>)
<u>Underlined text</u>	Words spoken with particular emphasis

4.2. Personal Experiential Themes

This section provides an overview of each participant's PETs and a brief summary of each participant's individual experience, supporting the reader in engaging effectively with the hermeneutic process by providing a sense of the individuals involved and interview process (Smith et al., 2022). By doing so, readers can better understand the data in their own way and make sense of the researcher's analysis and interpretation. Individual quotes relating to each PET are not explicitly provided in this section, but are later explored in more depth within the context of the GETS.

Please refer to appendix M for each participant's PETs, along with corresponding experiential statements and direct quotes.

Pseudonyms have been used throughout this thesis to protect the participants' anonymity, which were selected with participants at the beginning of the interviews.

4.2.1. Participant 1: Rosie

Rosie was the first to interview and she was supporting her young child throughout the interview which created some charming distractions for both Rosie and the researcher. Rosie explained that, although on maternity leave at the time of interview, she is both a class teacher and PSHE lead within her school and subsequently holds a joint responsibility in supporting students and supporting colleagues with RSE. Rosie spoke passionately about her role in providing RSE whilst reflecting on some of the challenges, especially in light of the new guidance, and the differences in providing RSE to SEN students in light of her relatively recent transition from mainstream to SEN teaching.

Figure 5.*Rosie's PETs***HARD TO KNOW: MAKING DECISIONS WITHOUT GUIDANCE**

- Making ambiguous decisions amid ambiguous guidance
- Am I doing the right thing?
- Strength in connections

TENSION SURROUNDING LABELS**LEAVING THE NEST: PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD**

- Transitioning into the unknown
- Letting them go

EMBRACING CHANGE

- Embracing authenticity over uniformity
- Adapting to new approaches

RETHINKING RSE IN NEURODIVERSE EDUCATION

- Navigating neurodiversity
- Reflective growth

LIGHT HEARTED APPROACHES**4.2.2. Participant 2: Jennifer**

Jennifer explained that she is the Relationships Sex and Health Education (RSHE) lead teacher within her school and so is responsible for a majority of RSE teaching and planning whilst also supporting colleagues across the school. Jennifer spoke passionately about her role and the importance of providing RSE for CYPwLD, however amidst this passion Jennifer also reflected on the struggles of bearing this responsibility largely single-handedly. Jennifer reflected on her own experiences of being neurodivergent and how these experiences had supported her empathy and understanding of the students they taught.

Figure 6.*Jennifer's PETs***ADVOCATING FOR INCLUSIVE AND EMPOWERING RSE**

- Overlooked and forgotten
- A core component
- A right to one's identity

STRUGGLING IN ISOLATION: INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

- Feeling alone, seeking connection
- Making subjective decisions without guidance
- Is this ethical?

WORKING WITH UNIQUE MINDS

- Relationships are complex
- New perspectives and insights

4.2.3. Participant 3: Janice

Janice reflected on her experiences as a class teacher in delivering RSE for CYPwLD. Janice had since moved to a primary setting, however she discussed how her previous school setting had navigated the implementation of the new statutory guidance. Janice reflected on the emotional and pedagogical challenges of teaching RSE to CYPwLD, discussing the impact of safeguarding and limited support available to teachers in navigating the subject. Janice spoke passionately about her role in delivering RSE and additionally about how RSE is vital in supporting students' awareness of difference and sense of belonging in society. Janice drew upon her own experience of being neurodivergent to support her understanding of her students and also thought very creatively within her role, sharing practical experiences that she had found supportive when delivering the subject.

Figure 7.*Janice's PETs***NAVIGATING AMBIGUOUS GUIDANCE**

- Following lacking guidance
- Have I done it right?
- Filling the gaps
- Evidence overshadowing RSE

EMOTIONAL LOADS

- Ready and resilient: Navigating safeguarding concerns
- Balancing teacher and student wellbeing

CREATING A CULTURE OF BELONGING

- Embracing difference
- Keeping it relevant, reducing dissonance

INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY**WHAT WORKS**

- Knowing your students
- Bringing RSE to life
- A safe and secure space

4.2.4. Participant 4: Danielle

Danielle shared her experiences of delivering RSE within her role as a Deputy Head whilst also holding a role as a designated lead in safeguarding and looked after children (LAC). Danielle felt passionately that RSE was one of the most important subjects in her school, considering it one of the cornerstone subjects essential for equipping students with the knowledge to understand their bodies and advocate for their own safety. Despite clear dedication, Danielle shed light on the challenges stemming from the lack of adequate support and understanding from external services, emphasising the importance of unity within the staff body to provide the best possible support for their students. An overview of Danielle's PETs can be found in figure 8.

Figure 8.*Danielle's PETs***A RIGHT TO RSE**

- A necessary challenge
- The right to safe exploration
- The right to be heard

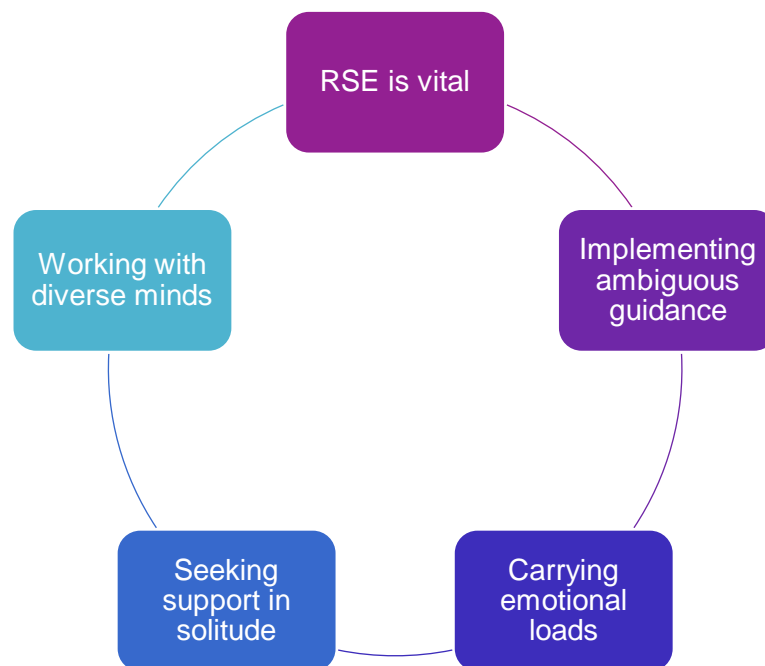
TRYING TO DO THE BEST WE CAN

- We're doing our best
- Are we doing enough?
- No one is helping

IT'S ALWAYS DIFFERENT**4.3. Group Experiential Themes**

The process of generating GETs from PETs involves an exploration of both shared and distinct experiences among participants. As emphasised by Smith et al. (2022), the process is dynamic, involving a fluid process of weaving between the different layers of analysis. Whilst some experiences were more evidently universal, with GETs resembling scaled up PETs, other layers of analysis converged to form entirely novel GETs. What is essential, however, is that these themes remain firmly rooted in the data. Thus, earlier stages of analysis were frequently revisited to ensure fidelity to each participant's experience, engaging with the hermeneutic process.

The resulting GETs can be found in figure 9, with the mapping of each participant's PETs to the subsequent GETs presented in appendix N.

Figure 9.*Overview of GETs*

Each GET was divided into subthemes to facilitate the exploration of participants' experiences, ensuring that their voices are honoured and represented authentically, while also contributing to the creation of a clear and compelling narrative (Nizza et al., 2021).

4.3.1. Group Experiential Theme 1: RSE is Vital

All participants expressed passionate views on the significance of providing RSE for CYPwLD. However, their enthusiasm was accompanied by an undercurrent tone of frustration. This emotionally charged theme was explored from slightly different angles by each participant, contributing to a rich understanding when their perspectives were brought together. Figure 10 illustrates the mapping of individual

participants PETs onto the overall GET. Each participant has been dedicated a specific colour corresponding to the colours used in section 4.2.

Figure 10.

GET 1: Mapping of PETs onto GET



4.3.1.1. The Right to Understand and Express Oneself

Both Danielle and Jennifer discussed the importance of RSE in equipping their students with skills and knowledge necessary to understand themselves as individuals, encompassing both their physical and emotional experiences. This understanding empowers students to lead happy and fulfilling adult lives. Jennifer explained:

I feel very passionately that people with special needs should have equal opportunities and access to all of this information and should be able to have relationships, sexual relationships, if that's what they want, when they become

adults [...] it really saddens me that the reality is that a lot of people (*pause*) don't, because they [...] don't know how because they haven't been taught that. (Jennifer, p. 21)

Jennifer's emphasis on the word 'should' was consistently reflected across both participants' use of language when discussing the importance of the subject, likely reflecting an acknowledgment of the inherent rights of the individuals they are supporting. Jennifer's sentiment suggests a strong empathy for the students she supports alongside a passionate frustration towards barriers resulting from societal attitudes and discrimination. Her advocacy for comprehensive RSE in this way reflects an understanding of the importance of empowerment through knowledge and skills, as well as a commitment to breaking down stigmas and misconceptions surrounding disability and sexuality. Her sadness at the reality that many individuals with special needs are denied these opportunities speaks volumes about the injustices and systemic challenges they may encounter, likely stemming from Jennifer witnessing first-hand the impact of societal barriers and the transformative potential of inclusive RSE.

Danielle also sought to normalise sexually related behaviour and students' rights to know and explore their own bodies, explaining how she works with parents to "talk about things that we can do to allow that young person to manage how they're feeling, to explore themselves safely and understand those feelings" (Danielle, p. 5). Additionally, Danielle strived to support students' rights to form relationships, helping parents to "see that it's healthy and it's something that you should explore if your

child is showing you they want to be close to somebody, but it's about being safe as well" (Danielle, p. 6).

Danielle's actions suggest a deep respect for the agency of her students, as well as a recognition of the importance of providing them with the knowledge necessary to navigate their experiences, emphasising the importance of home-school collaboration. Yet, Danielle's emphasis on safety acknowledges the complexity in simultaneously remaining aware of students' vulnerabilities. On one hand, she advocates for students' rights to explore their bodies and form relationships, whilst on the other hand, Danielle also emphasises the importance of safety in these explorations. Thus, the challenge lies in finding a delicate equilibrium between the two.

Jennifer reflected on the impact of providing students with such knowledge and skills, explaining, "it's just the way they take in the information is always interesting and you can kind of see them making realisations as you teach them stuff" (Jennifer, p. 12). Jennifer further explained that RSE sessions had supported pupils in understanding and validating their own sexuality, sharing:

We have had pupils coming out [...] and they, those pupils have referred directly to stuff they've learned in sessions and kind of said it's made [...] them understand themselves more fully and kind of has made lots of things make sense in their in their head (Jennifer, p.11).

Jennifer's experiences suggest a deep appreciation for the transformative power of RSE in facilitating self-discovery among students. By witnessing students'

realisations, Jennifer highlights the importance of creating safe and inclusive spaces where students can explore their identities without fear of judgment or further discrimination. It suggests that, for Jennifer, RSE not only equips students with factual knowledge but also empowers them to embrace and celebrate their identities.

Additionally, Danielle explained that RSE also enables students to communicate about their bodies and feelings, subsequently providing them with the skills necessary to advocate for their own needs. Reflecting on students with a high level of personal care and number of supporting adults, Danielle shared:

It's trying to get them to recognise that there are times where there are things that we do where we have to do, but that doesn't mean that [...] they shouldn't be voicing, they shouldn't be saying actually this is wrong. I'm not, I don't want this (Danielle, p. 7-8).

Danielle's experience further illustrates how RSE extends beyond simply imparting factual knowledge about relationships and sexuality. Instead, it encompasses the development of key life skills such as communication and self-advocacy, equipping students with the skills to navigate various aspects of their lives with autonomy and respect for their own needs and boundaries.

However, Jennifer advocacy didn't come without some challenge:

There was quite a lot of anxiety from support staff just about like these things being taught to our pupils. So I've had to do quite a lot of work with them as well around like reassuring them about like justifying and explaining why we're

teaching these things. So kind of almost similar anxieties to parents in a way, which has been quite interesting (Jennifer, p. 9).

Despite these external concerns, Jennifer remained committed to advocating for students' rights by proactively addressing anxieties and justifying the importance of RSE. Her efforts highlight her sense of the importance in overcoming societal barriers and misconceptions surrounding RSE to ensure that students receive comprehensive and inclusive RSE that respects their rights and autonomy.

However, these external anxieties were not a barrier to all participants. Rosie explained that developing relationships with parents had meant that there was a high level of trust within the home-school dynamic:

I think particularly at my school, there's definitely just much more trust from the parents in some ways that we're (*pause*) we've got the kids best interest at heart and with, you know, doing things in an appropriate way for them (Rosie, p. 10-11).

Rosie's experience offers a glimpse of how effective communication and relationship-building can mitigate these barriers, ultimately creating a supportive environment where students' rights to inclusive RSE are upheld.

4.3.1.2. A Core Component

In light of the role of RSE in supporting students' rights, all participants emphasised the importance of RSE as a core component of the curriculum within specialist settings. The idea that RSE should in fact be a core subject for CYPwLD, rather than

one they are effectively denied, was reflected heavily across teachers' experiences, with Jennifer articulating, "as far as I'm concerned, like, yeah, it's great if they've got their literacy, it's great if they've got their numeracy, but are they safe?" (Jennifer, p.19).

Danielle reflected Jennifer's sense of importance, however additionally acknowledged the challenges of teaching the subject, using humour to alleviate some tension: "it's one of the most important areas to teach [...] but it is also one of the (*laughs*) hardest areas to teach as well" (Danielle, p. 1).

Jennifer's assertion that safety should take precedence over academic subjects like literacy and numeracy suggests a view on the need for re-evaluation of educational priorities. In the past, there may have been a disproportionate emphasis on academic outcomes at the expense of students' rights to safety. Both Jennifer and Danielle's assertive tones likely stem from a sense of frustration with this imbalance. However, their reflections indicate a shifting mindset towards acknowledging the importance of prioritising students' safety and well-being.

Danielle further explained how this importance of RSE as a core subject was reflected across their school, explaining how teachers willingly take on the responsibility:

The teachers take the time out to really teach something [...] and don't think I'm gonna pass it on to the SENCO, I'm gonna pass it on to the behaviour lead, I'm gonna pass it on to the learning mentor. No, no, I'm gonna deal with

it. It's happening in my classroom. I'm gonna look at it, and I'm gonna deal with it as best as I can (Danielle, p. 19).

This reflects a departure from previous practices where RSE may have been treated as a peripheral aspect of education. Instead, Danielle's experience suggests a collective acknowledgment of the importance of RSE in promoting students' safety and well-being. Teachers' willingness to take ownership of RSE may indicate a broader cultural shift towards prioritising students' rights to a comprehensive education, including RSE.

Danielle, Rosie and Jennifer reflected on the tangible impact of RSE in equipping students with the necessary tools to ensure their safety, highlighting its vital role within the curriculum. Danielle recalled an experience within which RSE teaching had enabled a student to communicate a safeguarding concern with staff:

She did actually tell us that somebody had touched her and she was able to say where she'd been touched, and that it was somewhere private. She did understand. It's those things that- that's why it's so important, isn't it? Because obviously our children, our pupils here are so vulnerable and if we can teach them to be able to, to kind of come forward if something has happened, as well as teaching them obviously how to manage relationships, and be amongst people, and foster healthy relationships, you know? (Danielle, p. 11-12).

Jennifer further reflected this sentiment, acknowledging students' vulnerability within the current climate:

the real statistics which show that you know pupils with special needs are really much more vulnerable and open to, and more statistically likely to be abused and things like that. So, it's so paramount that as part of this curriculum they can kind of learn to identify and communicate things or parts of their body correctly (Jennifer, p. 7).

Rosie considered the importance of the subject in preparation for adulthood and transition into adult services, describing them as “awful and depressing” (Rosie, p. 21). Rosie felt a level of responsibility in ensuring that her students had the skills necessary to protect themselves when they left school, sharing: "I think the options once they leave school are so much more difficult to manage and like to access. So I think [...] we feel a lot of responsibility for getting them ready to go" (Rosie, p.21).

Taken together, these experiences highlight the ways in which RSE plays a crucial role in equipping students with the necessary skills to navigate their personal lives safely. For these teachers, RSE not only empowers students to recognise and respond to potential risks but also has the long-term impact of preparing students for adulthood and ensuring they have the skills necessary to protect themselves and make informed decisions as they transition into life beyond school.

Janice brought attention to an observation regarding the unequal access to RSE among her students. Janice noted that LAC who received additional support from professionals outside of the school setting had a better grasp of RSE concepts, highlighting the benefits of accessing the subject. This highlights the critical role of RSE as a core subject in promoting equality among students:

I think that showed actually a massive gap in the provision, because [...] some of the students that live a life that doesn't involve any of that external input, were almost very closed and guarded to discussing things like relationships with their parents, relationships with peers, because I think they didn't know how to [...] So I think in that sense, actually, the guidance and the implementation of this in the curriculum is actually vital, especially for our students because all of them need to be able to communicate that (Janice, p.8).

Overall, this GET emphasises the role of RSE in promoting the rights, safety, and well-being of CYPwLD. Participants highlighted the importance of RSE in empowering students to understand themselves, form healthy relationships, and advocate for their own needs. Their experiences collectively illustrate how RSE goes beyond imparting factual information about relationships and sexuality, extending to the development of key life skills, especially in preparation for adulthood. They emphasised the necessity of RSE as a core component of the curriculum, advocating for equal access to comprehensive education for all students. The theme indicated a consensus among participants regarding the vital role of RSE in promoting equality, safeguarding, and preparation for the adulthood among CYPwLD.

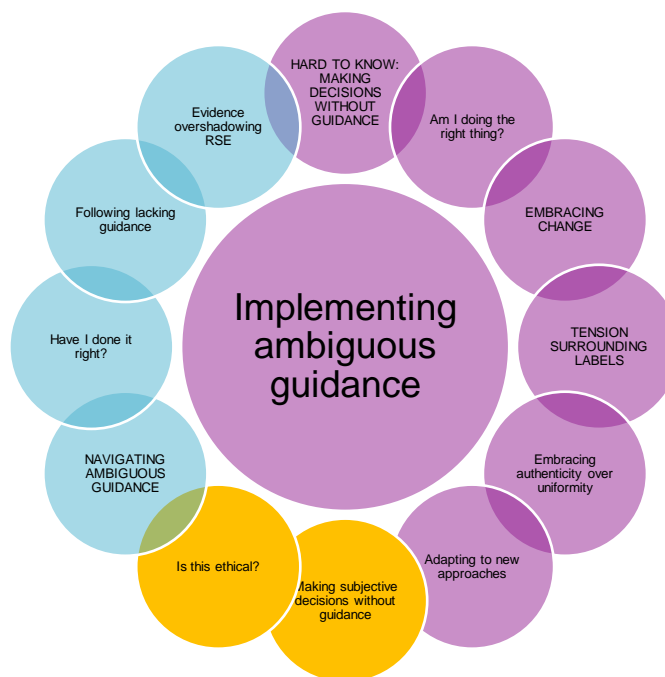
4.3.2. GET 2: Implementing Ambiguous Guidance

Rosie, Janice and Jennifer found themselves grappling with new yet ambiguous guidance, ethical dilemmas, and the pressure to ensure they are making the right

decisions for their students. This GET explores their experiences as they confront these challenges within their roles.

Figure 11.

GET 2: Mapping of PETs onto GET subthemes



4.3.2.1. Making Ambiguous Decisions Amid Ambiguous Guidance

Both Janice and Rosie felt that the new statutory guidance provided little direction for their specific learner demographic, leaving them feeling somewhat lost with where to begin:

it was sort of very much felt by sort of the standard classroom teachers, like myself, and our head of department that actually that guidance didn't give any

guidance (*laughs*) on what to do with our sort of learners. So, we were sort of floundering for a bit I'll be honest (Janice, p.1).

with... SEN, they, you know, the guidance says 'teach what you need to' (*laughs*) so it's very much like on the school and the teachers to make those decisions, which is quite tricky" (Rosie, p.2).

Both Janice and Rosie laughing while discussing the ambiguity of the guidance could indicate a shared sense of frustration or irony regarding the situation. Their laughter may reflect a coping mechanism to deal with the challenges they faced in interpreting and implementing the guidance effectively. Additionally, it could signify a recognition of the absurdity or difficulty of the task at hand. Janice's subsequent frustration with the guidance and the lack of support systems indicates the depth of her struggle: "The lack of guidance and support from the government, and from anyone in education really, about how to do it successfully with SEN students. It was non-existent. There was no help and support" (Janice, p.25). Seeking guidance from the local authority proved equally unhelpful, as even experts offered little more than vague encouragement to "'crack on, do what you think is best. You know the kids best.' Sort of do what you want and hope for the best if Ofsted come in and we'll see what comes from it (Janice, p.3).

Janice's experience reflects a systemic failure in providing adequate support and guidance for educators when it comes to teaching RSE to CYPwLD. Janice's sense of frustration with external bodies indicates an issue of neglect within the educational

system, where the unique needs of CYPwLD are overlooked or inadequately addressed.

In light of this ambiguity, Rosie and Jennifer discussed the complexity of subsequently having to decide what level of RSE would be appropriate for each student to access, with Rosie hesitantly explaining that “it can be quite tricky to know (*pause*) what they should be (*pause*) looking at” (Rosie, p. 2). Rosie explained that the process of deciding the level of content each student would cover “is quite a hard call to make [...] having those discussions, particularly with the upper school team. You know, saying like ohh they will, they won't. Like, that seems really like, you know, beyond our authority in some ways” (Rosie, p. 4).

Jennifer reflected a similarity in their experience of the difficulty in making such decisions, explaining:

We've sort of decided as a school that not all of our learners will be taught that content because it's not relevant to their age and stage [...] we wouldn't sit them down and say like, 'this is someone having sex,' kind of thing. Whereas our formal learners will have, do cover that within their sessions so they'll be learning about kind of the intricacies of sexual relationships and that's been quite a hard decision to make (Jennifer, p.3).

Rosie and Jennifer's experiences illuminate the weighty decisions special school teachers are being forced to make regarding the level of RSE content suitable for CYPwLD. Their hesitance and acknowledgment of the difficulty in making these decisions highlights the level of responsibility placed on teachers to navigate

potentially life-altering topics. Rosie expressed a sense of powerlessness in making these decisions, feeling unqualified to do so without clear direction. This sense of powerlessness may arise from a combination of uncertainty about ethical boundaries, fear of overstepping professional boundaries, and a lack of confidence in her own expertise in addressing such complex topics. Jennifer's reflection provides a sense of the ethical considerations involved, as these decisions can significantly impact students' life beyond school. This appears to reflect a systemic issue where teachers feel unequipped to navigate complex decisions about what is appropriate for their students in relation to RSE.

Jennifer went on to explain that making these decisions in the absence of guidance had left her grappling with unresolved ethical dilemmas and internal conflicts:

An internal struggle in my mind that, I was, I get a bit stuck with is that - and obviously there's no kind of real guidance around this, but you know, if you think about equal opportunities - in an ideal world all of our pupils would have the same information, just provided in a slightly different way, but I just, I mean I've worked on this for such a long time and I just feel there's no way of providing that information in in a different way (Jennifer, p.9).

Jennifer's internal struggle highlights the complexity and high level of responsibility placed on teachers in the decision-making surrounding RSE content in the absence of clear guidance. Her reference to the ideal of equal opportunities highlights a tension between the desire to provide all students with the equal information and the practical challenge of adapting such a complex subject to diverse needs, a challenge seemingly at odds with her own values. Jennifer's acknowledgment of the lack of

real guidance suggests frustration with the system's failure to support teachers in addressing these complexities.

Although Rosie did not explicitly discuss the ethical conflicts as outwardly as Jennifer, these difficulties were an undercurrent theme throughout the interview. Rosie grappled with a strong tension regarding ability grouping among their students within RSE, a contrast to her feelings about ability grouping in more academic subjects:

a couple of the kids were sort of on the more able end, and you know, we're working like using [...] It's all so hard to know how to say it, but higher, slightly higher up I suppose you say in things like maths and English" (Rosie, p.13).

This tension may reflect Rosie's internal conflicts about how to approach ability grouping in RSE. Explicitly grouping students as 'less able' would inherently tie to a lesser or denied opportunity, highlighting the ethical dilemmas Rosie faced in ensuring equitable access to education for all students.

4.3.2.2. Are We Doing the Right Thing? Sitting With Uncertainty.

Left to navigate the subject with limited support, Rosie, Jennifer and Janice found themselves grappling with anxiety in the face of uncertainty. Jennifer expressed the experience of constantly second-guessing, reflecting on the pressure of ensuring she was making the right decisions, explaining that "you're also always constantly second guessing yourself and worrying like is this - am I definitely doing the right thing?" (Jennifer, p. 14). Additionally, Jennifer expressed the challenge of being expected to assume an expert role despite feeling unqualified: "the reality is I'm not an expert on this, I'm just doing the best I can with the resources I've been given with

the limited training I've been given on this specific, in this specific topic" (Jennifer, p. 19-20).

Rosie echoed this sentiment, placing emphasis on the idea of 'getting it right' in RSE compared to more perceptually straightforward or clear academic subjects: "it feels more, it feels more sort of crucial that you get it right? I think things like, you know, the maths and the English curriculum, you can't go too far wrong if you're covering numbers (*laughs*)" (Rosie, p. 20). Janice further added to this, explaining the complexity of evaluating one's practice with essentially no point of reference:

Because obviously experience is subjective, and you know, until someone comes in and says, sort of like Ofsted but not really Ofsted, but whether you're doing a good job or not, or you know, you've got some sort of standardised reference, how do you actually know as a teacher? (Janice, p.26).

All three teachers' language tended to reflect a relatively fixed and polarised notion of 'right and wrong' as they approach the teaching of RSE. Phrases such as "doing the right thing" and "getting it right" likely stem from an acknowledgement of the significance RSE can have on students' lives. On one hand, there's a recognition of the critical role RSE plays in promoting students' well-being, safety, and autonomy. Providing carefully considered information can empower students to make informed decisions about their bodies, relationships, and sexual health. On the other hand, they feel a pressure to address complex topics in a way that is both developmentally appropriate and inclusive of diverse needs and life experiences. This pressure is amplified by the lack of clear guidance, creating heightened anxiety about their

competence in navigating these challenges effectively. Participants' conceptualisations of 'right and wrong' is also explored and understood in the GET 'working with diverse minds'.

Despite these complexities, Janice highlighted the importance of practicing self-compassion amidst the challenges: "I think then it's really important to be able to self-reflect on your own context and be like actually, for my kids, I've smashed that [...] sort of be kind to yourself on that front" (Janice, p. 22).

Janice's perspective offers a further glimpse into the self-doubt experienced by teachers grappling with the complexities of teaching RSE. Janice's acknowledgment of her own efforts emphasises the need for teachers to balance the pressure to provide RSE within the constraints of their experience. It highlights the importance of acknowledging one's efforts and successes, even in the face of uncertainty, to maintain a sense of resilience and self-worth.

4.3.2.3. Flexibility Allows for Authenticity

Despite feeling frustrated with the lack of guidance, Rosie and Janice exhibited a level of ambivalence regarding the ambiguity, simultaneously appreciating the authenticity that accompanies flexibility. Rosie articulated this more explicitly, explaining:

In some ways it's maybe for the best that it's broad, in some ways, because you know for some of our kids, you know, particularly the ones who have PMLD, for example, they have got very little awareness [...] we're working on them responding to light, you know, them responding to touch, that sort of

thing. So saying, you know, they need to understand consent is going to be like (*pause*) that's like, you know, so beyond what they're working on, it would just be like be, shoe on trying to like, do some sort of fake lesson for Ofsted (Rosie, p. 2-3).

Amidst the idea of inauthentic teaching, Janice revealed how her school environment had initiated a need for evidence of RSE delivery, coinciding with the subject's mandatory status and an impending Ofsted inspection:

I think because we were in that Ofsted window, it's a bit more panic from powers that be that actually if anyone did question it, there was that bit of evidence, so to speak, which sort of changed our approach a little bit, I think, potentially to the detriment of the students (Janice, p. 7).

These experiences highlight a tension between external accountability measures and the authentic delivery of RSE, carefully tailored to students' needs and developmental levels. Following more structured guidance may result in more rigid teaching practices that limit the capacity to tailor practice to students' specific needs. This inflexibility can impede meaningful learning experiences and fail to address the dynamic nature of RSE content, which may not fit into traditional teaching formats. Interestingly, it's worth noting that both Janice and Rosie held primary roles as class teachers, meaning that their interpretations of the guidance reflect a more practical view of its implementation.

In summary, this GET highlights some of the difficulties teachers have faced in their journeys of implementing the new statutory guidance. Particularly, the necessity of

determining the appropriate level of RSE for each student has posed complex and challenging ethical dilemmas surrounding equality of opportunity. These difficulties have meant that teachers are left grappling with feelings of uncertainty, doubting their own competence in the face of anxieties. Nonetheless, amidst these difficulties, some teachers did recognise the potential benefits of ambiguity, emphasising the importance of working flexibility to cater to individual needs, providing authentic and meaningful RSE for CYPwLD.

4.3.3. GET 3: Carrying Emotional Loads

Rosie, Janice and Danielle discussed the emotional complexities of teaching RSE, focusing on the profound impact it can have on both teachers and students.

Figure 12.

GET 3: Mapping of PETs onto GET



4.3.3.1. *Safeguarding and protecting students*

Issues relating to safeguarding were heavily prevalent across Janice and Danielle's experiences. Janice explained that in teaching students RSE, you are allowing them to potentially make sense of experiences of abuse or trauma, providing them with the skills to communicate these concerns and seek support: "you're probably more likely to have sort of safeguarding concerns and, you know, a lot of things ended up being recorded as cpoms or safeguarding concerns from our lessons" (Janice, p. 29).

Janice further elaborated that students needs mean that they are likely to communicate these realisations as and when they make them, meaning that she felt as though it was important to be mentally prepared or else "it could really hit you like a ton of bricks" (Janice, p.31):

You are sort of technically opening yourself up a bit more to that in that situation and then specifically with SEN students, like I say, because they're gonna do the reaction or the response when you mentioned the thing, because they don't have the ability to delay or hide it (Janice, p. 30).

Janice's experience sheds light on the emotional toll that teaching RSE to CYPwLD can have on teachers. Her mention of safeguarding concerns and the likelihood of incidents being recorded underscores the gravity of the situations that teachers may encounter during these lessons. The prospect of facing safeguarding issues or emotionally charged responses from students can be deeply unsettling for teachers, who may feel a heightened sense of responsibility for their students' well-being. Janice's use of simile emphasises the intensity of the experience and the potential for it to take a toll on teachers' emotional well-being.

Danielle also discussed the emotional challenges of safeguarding within RSE, describing her experience of holding this responsibility as “Very stressful (*laughs*). You worry all the time.” (Danielle, p.12). Danielle further explained that whilst RSE is vital in supporting students to communicate these needs, sometimes students aren't able to provide enough information to investigate concerns fully, meaning that worries remain unresolved:

It's just knowing that potentially something has happened to her and that we can't explore it, although it's been passed on and it's been dealt with, with the right people, it's knowing in the back of your mind that potentially we might never know what has happened because she couldn't articulate it, and even

though we tried lots of different ways to get her to think about where and who, she wasn't able to do so (Danielle, p. 12).

For Danielle, this was an emotionally heavy subject within which Danielle felt a significant level of personal responsibility for ensuring students safety, explaining that "it weighs down on you because you, you know that you can't protect them all the time" (Danielle, p.13).

Danielle's candid acknowledgment of feeling very stressed and worrying constantly further highlights the emotional toll that accompanies the role of safeguarding students in the context of RSE, aligning with Janice's earlier reflections.

Furthermore, Danielle's description of the frustration and helplessness in situations where students cannot articulate their experiences fully adds another layer of complexity to the emotional challenges. Like Janice, Danielle grapples with the weight of knowing that she cannot always fully protect her students from potential harm. This sense of personal responsibility, alongside the possibility of disclosures, contributes to the emotional strain experienced by teachers like Danielle.

Rosie also grappled with the weight of safeguarding and protecting students, expressing concerns about their transition from the "very safe [school] environment" (Rosie, p. 22) into adult services. For Rosie, the experience felt akin to leaving the familial nest for the students who, Rosie explained, "have been there you know for 15 years sort of thing. It's always very emotional. And they have all these pictures from when they're really little and everything." (Rosie, p. 22). Subsequently, Rosie

felt a significant emotional and familial responsibility for preparing students to protect themselves:

Because that's like a major safeguarding thing, like if we can get them toilet trained and so they're not having to rely on somebody changing them. That's like a major thing. You know, one for their like confidence, but yeah, two from a safeguarding perspective" (Rosie, p. 22).

Rosie's emphasis on the importance of toilet training for students, both in terms of confidence-building and safeguarding, indicates her deep sense of responsibility and care for her students. Her perspective reflects a caregiver-like responsibility, where she considers not only their emotional well-being but also their practical needs as they navigate their transition into adulthood.

4.3.3.2. Where Do Teachers Go?

In light of the emotional challenges surrounding RSE Janice and Danielle discussed the need to offload and seek support for their own well-being. Janice explained the harsh reality of dealing with safeguarding concerns as a teacher:

Hopefully if you're working in a nice school where you've got support around, you'd be able to, you know, step out for five or whatever. But, the reality is there isn't always the facility to do that so you've just gotta carry on as the teacher. You know, you have to just put on that brave face and carry on, you've got your next lesson to do (Janice, p.31).

Janice further emphasised the impact of holding such concerns with the limited support structures available to teachers:

Where do teachers go? You know, we don't have supervision. You know, like therapists, social workers, we don't have sort of really debrief time. You might be able to talk to a member of staff in your school. I was very lucky that I could speak to my co-teacher about stuff. But if you don't, you're taking that home with you then, you're taking it with you and that's on your shoulders then, so to speak (Janice, p.31).

Janice's experience highlights the lack of support structures available to teachers to process and manage the weight of their responsibilities. Janice's experience of feeling "very lucky" to have the opportunity to confide in their co-teacher gives insight into the stark reality for many teachers who lack even this basic support network. Despite gratitude for this outlet, Janice brings light to a clear broader issue of inadequate support structures, leaving many teachers to navigate their difficulties largely on their own, potentially increasing the risk of burnout.

Danielle, however, was able to seek some support within her senior leadership team to help alleviate some of these emotional challenges, explaining that the "headteacher is really good so we'll look at a particular case and talk through everything that's been done and then I can just share any worries that I've still got" (Danielle, p.16). Additionally, she was able to seek support from the whole team:

In our senior leadership meeting weekly, we have a safeguarding check in weekly [...] and say I'm still worried about this and we'll talk about it between us all and just make sure that we're, A) all aware and, B) kind of sharing potential problem solving ideas you know, thinking about what to do next (Danielle, p.16-17).

Danielle's experience highlights the importance of having supportive leadership structures. By engaging in regular check-ins and discussions, Danielle not only receives validation for her concerns but also benefits from collective problem-solving and decision-making. This support system likely contributes to Danielle's sense of resilience in managing safeguarding issues, ultimately facilitating her role while also prioritising her well-being. It emphasises the significance of leadership in creating a positive and supportive work environment, where staff feel valued and heard.

Overall, this GET shows the emotional strain experienced by teachers in delivering RSE for CYPwLD. It highlights the weight of responsibility and the challenges of managing safeguarding concerns, particularly when students disclose in or around lessons. The lack of adequate support structures further exacerbates the emotional toll on teachers, who often find themselves navigating these difficulties alone. However, supportive leadership can mitigate some of these challenges by providing opportunities for validation and problem-solving. Ultimately, addressing the emotional needs of both students and teachers is crucial for creating a safe and supportive learning environment.

4.3.4. GET 4: Seeking Support in Solitude

This GET encapsulates the experiences of all participants in grappling with the complexities of teaching RSE without sufficient external support structures. It explores the ways in which the participants sought to resolve these difficulties.

Figure 13.

GET 4: Mapping of PETs onto GET



4.3.4.1. No-one Else Understands.

Jennifer, Janice, and Danielle shared an underlying 'us and them' dynamic when discussing other services. They perceived a lack of shared experience among these services, leading to a lack of understanding and disconnect. Danielle emphasised that these challenges were "the thing that I find the most frustrating" (se, p. 14) and shared an experience of working with adult services that did not understand the realities of students' lives:

I actually had one social worker say to me, 'well, they haven't disclosed anything, so there's nothing I can do until they disclose' and that shocked me to the core because I was like if you are expecting any of our students to say,

you know openly, this is what happened and this is what happened then you- it's impossible. They are disclosing, they're disclosing through their behaviour. Their behaviour is showing us that something is not right. That is their disclosure (Danielle, p. 15-16).

Danielle's experience reflects a fundamental lack of alignment between different support services, particularly regarding safeguarding protocols and understanding students' needs. The social worker's response illustrates a disconnect between the expectations of adult services and the realities of working with CYPwLD. This potentially highlights a systemic issue where the unique needs of CYPwLD are not understood and supported by other support services, ultimately compromising students' well-being and placing them at risk.

Both Danielle and Jennifer shared experiences of attempting to develop their knowledge through RSE training sessions which unfortunately were relatively unhelpful due to these differences:

I have been put on like training sessions around RSHE, but again I often find that most of the people on the session, in the sessions are either like mainstream teachers or mainstream teachers working in a unit, so their pupils have much better understanding" (Jennifer, p. 16).

I've joined the [local authority name] RSE network and they meet regularly, but there's not many special schools that are in that network. So although I'm having conversations, it's really difficult to, and I'm meeting with other leads from other lots of other discussions and the focus that they're having isn't quite the same as what I need here (Danielle, p. 23).

Danielle and Jennifer's experiences highlight the isolation and sense of being overlooked that they face in working to provide RSE for CYPwLD. Both teachers expressed frustration with the lack of relevance of mainstream training sessions and networks to the needs specific to their provisions. This further suggests a systemic issue where the needs of special schools and their students are not prioritised or understood within the education system, leading to a sense of isolation and disconnect.

Janice echoed this difficulty, explaining that whilst training events are helpful in some ways, hearing from experts is less helpful because "that person's never been a teacher [...] they know what they're talking about, but they don't know how to actually teach it" (Janice, p. 27). Instead, Janice valued the experience of learning from those who did share and understand their experience, explaining that "what is really useful post-course is the networking events [...] Because it's often through those discussions as a teacher, regardless of the subject, you make your most breakthroughs and you make your most meaningful changes to your practice" (Janice, p. 27).

Janice placed value on importance of shared experience among teachers, particularly when it comes to CPD. Janice's critique of traditional CPD events highlights a challenge in the gap between theoretical expertise and practical application in the classroom. While experts may possess valuable knowledge, their lack of shared experience can limit their capacity to provide meaningful training for teachers.

4.3.4.2. Figuring it Out Ourselves

Danielle and Jennifer shared isolated experiences of creating an RSE curriculum and supporting their students without external support. Jennifer explained the challenges of navigating such a complex subject alone:

If you're trying to do it all in your own head it just gets very confusing. You kind of need to be like, can we put this here? Does that make sense? Is there gonna be an issue with that? Because obviously you don't wanna make a whole load of resources and then realise something doesn't quite work? (Jennifer, p. 17).

Similarly, Danielle echoed this sentiment, expressing a sense of isolation in the process of devising the curriculum "very much ourselves." (Danielle, p. 24).

Taken together, these experiences indicate a similar experience of grappling with complex decisions and uncertainties alone. Jennifer's remark about the process being "very confusing" (p. 17) captures the mental strain of planning the curriculum without validation or feedback. Similarly, Danielle's acknowledgment of creating the curriculum "very much ourselves" (p. 24) provides sense of sole responsibility, heightening the pressure felt in the absence of collaborative input.

Jennifer reflected on feelings of being overwhelmed by the responsibility, desiring more support and collaboration:

I guess I'd just like there to be more people who are as fired up as I am (laughs), I mean, I'm sure there are, but I just feel a bit like alone in it though, and having to make all these decisions and come up with all these ideas for a whole school, it can be quite overwhelming and daunting (Jennifer, p.19).

Jennifer's experience paints a picture of Jennifer as someone who is dedicated to her cause but also highly aware of the uphill battle she faces. Her laughter likely serves as a coping mechanism, a way to manage the daunting reality of feeling alone in the process. Her desire for more support suggests a need for a community of like-minded individuals to share the weight of the challenge.

However, Janice and Rosie appeared to find some solace in collaborating internally with their colleagues. Janice emphasised the value of comparing notes with a partner teacher:

So, you know, my partner teacher, who taught the other equivalent of the year 9 class, we'd absolutely compare notes. And again, we tried to teach our lesson at the same time as each other as well, so that after and prior, but particularly after, we could almost have a debrief on a Thursday after school and be like, how did that go for you? What misconceptions did your kids have? Did mine have the same, etcetera, etcetera. What worked well for you? (Janice, p. 23).

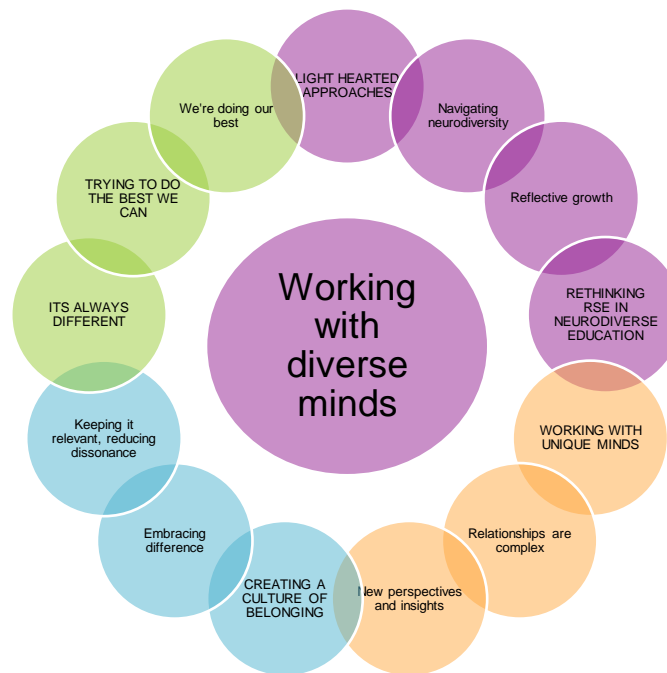
Rosie also emphasised the importance of communication with parents as well as colleagues, indicating a collective effort in shaping the RSE curriculum and supporting students effectively: "among staff it's just like there's a lot of just talking to each other and being like, what do you think? What do you think? What do you think?" (Rosie, p.11), whilst also "speaking to the parents and being like, oh, this is, you know, they've been doing this at school (*laughs*). Like you know, what do you want? What would you like us to work on with them?" (Rosie, p. 4).

Janice and Rosie's experiences show how they have used internal collaboration as a means of compensating for the lack of external support structures. By working with their school community, they create a sense of solidarity, doing what they can to provide the best possible support for their students.

This GET delves into the participants' struggles with the lack of external support structures while navigating the complexities of teaching RSE. Participants expressed a sense of isolation and frustration due to perceived disconnects with other services and mainstream training sessions. Despite these challenges, some found solace in internal collaboration with colleagues, emphasising the importance of communication and sharing experiences.

4.3.5. GET 5: Working with Diverse Minds

GET 5 explores the complexities of navigating neurodiverse thinking styles among CYPwLD in the context of RSE. Teachers grappled with the unique challenges posed by neurodiversity, seeking to create an inclusive environment where every student feels valued and understood whilst receive meaningful and empowering RSE.

Figure 14.**GET 5: Mapping of PETs onto GET****4.3.5.1. Navigating Neurodiverse Thinking**

Rosie, Jennifer and Janice considered the complexities of working with neurodiverse thinking styles. For Rosie, it was challenging to get into the minds of the students as she was unable to draw directly from her own experiences of RSE to inform her teaching: "I think cause obviously in mainstream, like, you are the adults. You know, there's neurotypical people, so we know like what [...] we could have used as kids, whereas it's a bit different" (Rosie, p. 20).

Jennifer also reflected on the complexities of working with differences in thinking and the challenge in translating the complex and abstract concepts involved in relationships into a structured and concrete form:

I guess because the way a lot of them think is so black and white you kind of have to cater to that through this teaching and it's, that's what's so challenging because it's just obviously relationships aren't black and white (Jennifer, p.19).

For instance, Jennifer recounted an incident where a student thought they couldn't interact with a stranger whilst working in the school café, illustrating the unpredictable outcomes of teaching RSE to students with different thinking styles:

One of my pupils was working in the cafe and a person she didn't know came into the cafe and ordered and she just refused to speak to him. And I said "Why are you? Why are you not speaking?" And she was like, "Because it's a person I don't know." And I was like "Oh my gosh. Yeah, of course. Like, you're totally right", so then I'm kind of like, right, go back to the drawing board, look at it again. How do we? How do we adapt this to make it work in this situation? You know, it's like, it's really, you really have to think about everything (Jennifer, p. 18).

Rosie and Jennifer share some of the complexities in teaching RSE, particularly in context where students have diverse neurodevelopmental needs. The challenges arise not only from the complexities of RSE but also from the differences in thinking styles between neurotypical teachers and their students. In this way, Rosie and Jennifer felt that they perceived and processed information in different ways to their students, requiring them to continuously learn and adapt their teaching approaches. In the context of RSE, where interpersonal relationships and social dynamics are central, this difference in thinking styles becomes more evident, needing creative teaching strategies to bridge this gap.

However, both Jennifer and Janice were also able to draw upon some similarities in thinking, discussing their own experiences of being neurodivergent and using this shared experience and personal connection with their students to support their understanding of students thinking:

I just really enjoyed working with the pupils with special needs more than the mainstream kids and also have like learning disabilities myself, I'm dyslexic, dyspraxic and have ADHD. So I sort of feel like I have some level of empathy and understanding with the pupils that I work with (Jennifer, p. 20).

The relationship path is particularly difficult for students with ASD or who are on the spectrum because obviously an inherent difficulty for them is relationships and understanding relationships and how they can be perceived, etcetera. And this was something I was quite apprehensive about delivering myself, being autistic myself as a teacher (Janice, p. 2).

Jennifer's personal journey with neurodivergence creates a deeper level of connection with her students, recognising the value that her own neurodiversity brings to her teaching. Similarly, Janice's disclosure of having ASC adds another layer of authenticity and relatability to their teaching practice. Janice's own experience with the challenges of understanding relationships and social dynamics gives her a deeper understanding of the difficulties her students may face. Overall, Jennifer and Janice's experiences highlight the value of personal connection and empathy in teaching RSE to students with neurodevelopmental differences.

4.3.5.2. A Culture of Acceptance.

For Janice, RSE went beyond imparting knowledge about relationships and sexuality; it was about creating a culture of belonging and providing a space to teach about difference. Given that the students themselves exhibited diverse characteristics and needs, Janice saw RSE as an opportunity to create an inclusive environment where every individual felt valued and understood, explaining that RSE "gives [...] children a sense of belonging as well, in society" (Janice, p. 24). In essence, RSE served as a means to celebrate the unique qualities of each student and promote acceptance and understanding of differences within the school community:

We did a lot of stuff around (*pause*) not just being physically attracted to someone, you know, what other qualities do people have that makes them attractive? [...] And again, for our slightly more able students who were perhaps aware of their own differences, they were really receptive to that because they knew, you know, we had like one girl who was like, "oh, I know I'm in a wheelchair, miss. So, maybe someone would think the same about me, cause I've still got a really nice personality." And you're like, absolutely (Janice, p. 11).

Building on Janice's perspective of RSE as a means to cultivate inclusivity, both Janice and Rosie were deeply moved by the natural acceptance of difference demonstrated by their students within RSE lessons. Rosie, in particular, found herself questioning societal norms and prejudices in light of their students' lack of concern with gender norms:

All term you'd be saying, you know, is [unintelligible] a boy or girl and they had no idea, you know, random guesswork every time. And I thought that was just

so interesting because they were obviously just not classifying people how we did and they were just not it, it's almost like it was completely irrelevant to them. And I sort of thought like, why are we pushing this so much? (laughs) Like, does it really matter that much?" (Rosie, p. 13-14).

Janice observed an awareness of prejudice and discrimination among her students when they were given the opportunity to learn about different relationships and meet a gay couple. Janice compared this with their experience of mainstream students explaining, "if I'd have just brought a gay adult couple into a classroom of 30 children, at least half of them would be losing their minds, making inappropriate comments, having something to say" (Janice, p.17). However, Janice's experience in SEN was remarkably different:

He was trying to ask was like, 'Do you get bullied? Does anyone say anything mean to you?', because we'd really highlighted that technically they're different being two men as opposed to a man and a woman [...] and some of the children's faces when the one gentleman started talking about, and unfortunately, that he'd been a victim of a homophobic attack, physically, when he was younger. And, you know, as much as my children probably didn't understand the full implications and repercussions of that, they understood at a basic level: he'd been hurt because somebody didn't like that he was with a man [...] they understood that there was a difference there, and then someone had took it upon themselves to not, therefore, be kind (Janice, p. 18-19).

Jennifer discovered that her students showed openness and acceptance when discussing RSE topics. Contrary to societal norms, her students did not demonstrate the same social inhibitions or sense of shame typically associated with discussions about sex and relationships:

I said, like, you know, if you need to have a laugh about it, that's fine. It might make you feel a bit embarrassed, might make you feel a bit like funny and all these things and they just looked at me like I was completely mad. They just thought it was very, they don't have the same (*laughs*) social inhibitions that we might have which is a really good thing and like, takes it away from being a big barrier to the education cause they just, they just want to know the information, really, they don't really find it embarrassing or strange, they're just very open" (Jennifer, p. 11).

Jennifer's discovery of her students' openness to discussing RSE topics challenges conventional societal norms. This aligns with Rosie's observations of her students' indifference to traditional gender classifications and Janice's experience of their empathy towards differences in relationships. Neurodivergent individuals, as seen in these experiences, may exhibit a more fluid and accepting perspective on diversity, challenging conventional societal attitudes.

Janice emphasised the importance creating a culture of acceptance by maintaining a teaching approach that aligns with the students' lived experiences, thus not exacerbating feelings of difference. Janice believed that discussing RSE topics that students haven't encountered or thought about yet could potentially create feelings of abnormality or discomfort:

What would be the point? You're probably more likely to make them distressed by, you know, bringing in an idea to them that, you know, things like erections can happen for boys because as much as it's a natural part for most teenage boys to start experimenting, playing with themselves, having those experiences you know from sort of 13 onwards, for our children that isn't happening. You know, most of them are still wearing nappies, unable to control their own bladder, relying on personal care for everything, so they're not having those private moments [...] some of the slightly more *(pause)* reflective students and students with anxiety would then be thinking, well, I don't do that. Am I weird? Am I missing out? (Janice, p. 13)

For these teachers, RSE provided a space to promote and appreciate acceptance, understanding, and respect for diversity, ultimately contributing to a more inclusive learning environment where every individual felt valued and understood. Additionally, the aforementioned concerns about getting aspects of RSE "wrong" may be rooted in a fear of causing harm if topics are discussed in an inappropriate manner or at an inappropriate time.

4.3.5.3. Finding What Works

Despite challenges they faced, there was an unwavering commitment to providing inclusive and supportive RSE to their students. Teachers went above and beyond, leveraging their creativity, resourcefulness, and collaborative efforts to ensure that their students received comprehensive and meaningful RSE.

Danielle explained that "it's working in an environment where everybody is so invested in these young people and their development" (Danielle, p. 18). Danielle explained the shared responsibility of staff within their school who will always go the extra mile:

Everybody's got that role, you know, everyone's got that hat and they don't just expect the pastoral leads to kind of think about that issue and address that issue. Everybody in that class that is coming into contact with that young person is thinking about that issue, everybody is thinking about how we can address it. They're talking to the parents, they're looking at the people's behaviour plan if it's presenting as a behaviour, they're talking in their class meetings, they're liaising with me or potentially other professionals or with the parents, and they're just so invested in making our young people at the school as well-rounded as possible (Danielle, p. 18-19).

Her description gives a sense of a culture of investment and shared responsibility, which creates a supportive system where everyone takes their role with dedication. The emphasis on collaboration among staff members, parents, and other professionals highlights the importance of teamwork in providing comprehensive support to students. Danielle's account speaks to a culture of care, where the commitment to students' success extends beyond individual roles or responsibilities, fostering a sense of unity and shared purpose within the school community.

Janice and Danielle highlighted the importance of relationships and taking the time to know and understand the individuality of students they supporting, thus ensuring they are receiving the most meaningful and appropriate RSE:

It's taught differently in every class, as is most of our learning here, because each class, although we're a school for young people with complex and profound needs, and they all do have complex and profound needs, they are all completely different (Danielle, p.1).

Janice further explained that "it comes with a bit with experience of knowing those specific kids" (Janice, p. 14). In knowing the students, Janice was able to use individualised strategies that get "into the niche of their interests" (Janice, p. 8), such as Peppa pig, cartoons and sensory objects. Jennifer echoed this, using things "like games and songs within those sessions, [...] simple cartoon videos and things like that which they can also be quite motivated by" (Jennifer p. 5).

Rosie tended to use light hearted approaches when teaching RSE, alleviating any internal discomfort with light humour which was reflected in her approach with students:

The three boys I'm thinking of you could kind of tease them out of it, you know (*laughs*). But you know, say oh, I know, I know it's uncomfortable talking about a penis (*laughs*). You know, things like that, and they'd laugh, but, you know, be yeah just kind of trying not to embarrass them too much basically, but being clear, you know, it's OK to talk about these things like you know every, you know, everyone's got a body (Rosie, p. 9)

By incorporating light humour and banter into her approach, Rosie creates a relaxed environment where students feel more at ease engaging in conversations about RSE. Her ability to tease out uncomfortable topics demonstrates her skill in

navigating potentially awkward situations while still conveying important messages effectively. Rosie's approach emphasises the importance of normalising RSE topics and reassuring students that it's okay to talk about them openly. Overall, her light-hearted approach is a valuable tool in breaking down barriers around RSE.

Despite grappling with the complexities of neurodiverse thinking, these teachers remained committed to providing inclusive and supportive RSE. By fostering a culture of acceptance, understanding, and respect for diversity, they contributed to creating an inclusive learning environment where every individual felt valued and understood. Through their passion for RSE, they demonstrated a commitment to meeting the unique needs of their students and ensuring they received meaningful and empowering RSE.

Chapter 5 – Discussion

5.1. Chapter Overview

This chapter aims to summarise the findings and connect them with existing theories and literature. Additionally, the discussion explores how the findings contribute to the broader discourse on RSE for CYPwLD and highlights the implications for future research and practice. In doing so, the study aims to shed light on the implications for education professionals, policymakers, and researchers.

5.2. Summary of Findings

This study aimed to explore how secondary school teachers are experiencing the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD in light of recent legislative changes which made RSE mandatory in all schools in England from September 2020. The analysis led to the identification of five overarching group themes. Smith et al. (2022) emphasise that IPA is an integrative approach, highlighting that “researchers may draw upon a considerable interpretive range, and make connections with an array of other theoretical positions as part of the process” (Smith et al., 2022, p. 133)., These themes will be considered within the context of the studies discussed within Chapter 2, with further consideration of relevant psychological theory and relevant research which seeks to provide insight into the findings.

5.2.1. GET 1: RSE is Vital

The GET 'RSE is vital' highlighted teachers' advocacy for the importance of RSE for CYPwLD. Across all participants, there was a clear consensus on the impact of RSE on the lives of CYPwLD. Through a range of personal and professional experiences, teachers showed the variety of ways in which RSE serves as a transformative means of empowering CYPwLD, impacting their lives in numerous positive ways.

This finding aligns with existing literature's emphasis of the fundamental human right to sexual expression and the role of RSE in facilitating CYPwLD's development of intimate and fulfilling relationships. Aligning with insights from Borawska-Charko et al. (2023), Nelson et al. (2020), Ogur et al. (2023), and Wilkenfeld & Ballan (2011), participants emphasised the importance of RSE in empowering CYPwLD on their journey towards happy, healthy, and safe adulthood. Jennifer's assertion that "that people with special needs should have equal opportunities and access to all of this information" (Jennifer, p. 12) encapsulates the views expressed by the teachers, who used terms such as "vital" (Janice, p. 8), "paramount" (Jennifer, p.7) and "important" (Danielle, p. 11) to emphasise the significance of RSE in this regard.

In addition, the findings of this study further expand the discourse on human rights in the context of RSE. Whilst previous research has considered the importance of RSE in empowering students voice, providing them with the skills to make choices and say "no" (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Nelson et al., 2020; Rohleder, 2010), Danielle and Jennifer added depth to the discussion and considered more intricate dimensions, such as the right to understand oneself, including one's sexual orientation. While existing literature acknowledges the human right to express one's

sexuality and develop intimate relationships, with some consideration as to sexual orientation (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023), this study provides an growing level of insight into the importance of RSE and the depths of human rights it supports.

In light of the impact of RSE in empowering CYPwLD to exercise their human rights, all participants in this study reflected a view that RSE should be elevated to the status of a core subject within the curriculum: "as far as I'm concerned, like, yeah, it's great if they've got their literacy, it's great if they've got their numeracy, but are they safe?" (Jennifer, p.19). This idea was somewhat reflected in previous literature's similar consideration of the importance of RSE in reducing vulnerability and ensuring students' safety (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Finlay et al., 2015; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Ogur et al., 2023; Rohleder, 2010; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011), however, there was notable tendency to displace the responsibility for RSE to others (e.g. healthcare professionals).

Prior studies have illuminated debates regarding who should be considered best suited to teach RSE, with some teachers expressing reservations about venturing beyond academic subjects (Nelson et al., 2020; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011). In contexts where RSE wasn't exactly compulsory for CYPwLD within the national framework, some teachers showed a tendency to avoid the subject altogether (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Rohleder, 2010), which is especially interesting in light of Ogur et al.'s (2023) finding that 56.2% of teachers in their study (n=32) had never delivered RSE. However, in this study, all teachers emphasised the importance of their role in providing RSE, with Danielle further emphasising how teachers in their school setting take on the responsibility without

question. The fairly recent compulsory status of RSE in the UK (DfE, 2019) may have contributed to a shift in teachers' willingness to take responsibility for the subject, as it eliminates room for debate and mandates its integration into the curriculum. This compulsory status may have helped to foster a sense of ownership and accountability, embedding RSE as an inherent part of educational practice for CYPwLD.

The idea of RSE for CYPwLD being 'vital' can be considered in relation to the medical and social models of disability. The medical model traditionally views disability as a deficit within the individual that requires medical intervention or 'fixing' (Laing, 1998). In contrast, the social model emphasises the societal barriers that disable individuals, rather than the difficulty itself (Mitra, 2006).

By denying CYPwLD access to comprehensive RSE, society effectively exacerbates their difficulties by restricting access to information and the skills necessary to understand and navigate intimate relationships and sexuality in a safe way. This aligns with the principles of the medical model, as it focuses on the perceived limitations of the individual rather than addressing the systemic barriers that hinder them within society. In contrast, the social model of disability highlights the importance of removing these barriers to enable individuals with disabilities to exercise their rights and participate in all aspects of life, including relationships and sexuality. Comprehensive RSE for CYPwLD serves as a means of reducing these barriers by empowering individuals with the knowledge and skills to navigate intimate relationships safely and exercise their rights.

Furthermore, in the context of the UK, both sexual orientation and disability are protected characteristics under the Equality Act (2010). This legislation reflects the recognition of the rights of individuals with disabilities, as well as the importance of promoting equality and non-discrimination in all aspects of life, including RSE.

Therefore, denying CYPwLD access to comprehensive RSE not only exacerbates their difficulties but also arguably violates their rights as protected by legislation. It is imperative for society to adopt a rights-based approach that ensures all individuals, regardless of difference, have equal access to information and support to develop healthy and fulfilling relationships.

Additionally, an intriguing discrepancy from previous literature regarded parental attitudes towards RSE for CYPwLD. While previous literature found that teachers had difficulties navigating parental attitudes (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al., 2017; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019), such that it yielded an entire theme within the literature review (see section 2.4.2), the current study yielded relatively contrasting findings. Specifically, only one participant, Jennifer, reported experiencing parental anxiety regarding students access to RSE. In contrast, the other participants described much more trusting and collaborative relationships with parents, indicating a greater level of openness to RSE, with some caregivers actively seeking school support with RSE related issues at home. Interestingly, this finding does fall in line with Borawska-Charko et al. (2023) and Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al. (2017) who emphasised the importance of collaboration in overcoming these barriers. This shift in parental attitudes towards RSE for CYPwLD could suggest a potential shift in societal norms. However, it remains

unclear whether this change reflects broader societal trends or is specific to the context of the study.

5.2.2. GET 2: Implementing Ambiguous Guidance

The theme of 'implementing ambiguous guidance', particularly the subtheme 'making ambiguous decisions amid ambiguous guidance', has not been directly prevalent in previous literature, essentially because it directly relates to teachers context specific experience of the recent change in UK legislation. However, the compulsory status of RSE was unclear in many countries, which may have contributed to discussions around feelings of uncertainty in navigating the subject (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Rohleder, 2010). While previous studies may not have explicitly addressed this theme, they did shed light on the broader challenge of grappling with uncertainty and ambiguity in the context of RSE implementation.

Rohleder (2010) highlighted that some teachers experienced feelings of anxiety or uncertainty regarding their approach to teaching RSE, particularly fearing that they might inadvertently 'encourage' sexual behaviour. Similarly, in the present research, Janice, Rosie and Jennifer also expressed concerns about 'doing the wrong thing', however their worries were more focused on whether they were providing *enough* information for the developmental stage of the CYP in terms of equality. This distinction suggests that while both groups of teachers experienced apprehension, the specific nature of their concerns differed, reflecting varying interpretations of their roles and responsibilities in delivering RSE. Notably, however, there is a significant time gap between the present research and Rohleder's (2010) study, which may

indicate the role of temporal shifts in societal narratives. However, it's intriguing to note that despite this gap, uncertainty and anxiety around teaching RSE persist among participants. While the source of worry may have shifted over time, the underlying anxiety surrounding the teaching of RSE seems to endure in this study. This suggests that despite evolving societal norms and educational policies, teachers may continue to grapple with apprehensions related to RSE delivery.

Additionally, in Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis' (2019) study, the phenomenon of RSE becoming 'invisibilised' in Sweden meant that teachers didn't hold clear responsibility for its delivery. Consequently, teachers who felt less confident or comfortable with the subject tended to avoid it altogether. This situation mirrors the ambiguity and uncertainty experienced by teachers in the present research and aligns with the findings of Rohleder's (2010) study in South Africa, where similar feelings were observed regarding the teaching of RSE. Despite the geographical and cultural differences between these studies, the common thread of uncertainty and subsequent anxiety in the absence of clear structures highlights the universal challenges faced by educators in navigating this complex and sensitive topic.

The BART System of Group and Organisational Analysis, developed by Green and Molenkamp (2005), provides a useful framework for considering some of these challenges. The system offers a framework to understand the dynamics and structures that shape group interactions and organisational functioning. Central to this framework are four dimensions: boundary, authority, role and task (BART). In the context of this study, the BART System provides a framework to examine the impact

of unclear structures and ambiguous boundaries on teachers' ability to navigate and deliver RSE effectively.

Within the context of RSE becoming compulsory for all pupils in the UK, the concept of "boundary" and "task" become a significant element to consider. Green and Molenkamp (2005) explain that 'boundaries' serve as the invisible scaffolding shaping interactions and dynamics within groups, involving various dimensions such as time, task, territory, resources, roles, and responsibilities. It is essential that these boundaries are adhered to, clarified and agreed upon to support smooth task execution. In essence, boundaries play a pivotal role in providing structure and guidance to groups or organisations, ultimately contributing to overall success.

Green and Molenkamp (2005) go on to explain that the concept of 'task' can be broken down into different types. The 'primary task' represents the dynamic objective that a group or organisation seeks to accomplish. While similar tasks may have been undertaken before, each instance of the task remains unique due to changes in circumstances and perspectives. Conflicts often arise when differing perceptions of the task exist among group members or between different groups. Primary tasks align with the core mission of an organisation, however, organisations often face multiple tasks competing for attention, requiring clarity and authority to prioritise tasks effectively. Alongside the primary task, groups also have a survival task, driven by an unconscious instinct to ensure the group's continuity. Clarity, differentiation of task types, and recognition of the fluid nature of tasks are crucial for effective task management within groups and organisations.

The findings of this study showed that, despite the compulsory status of RSE, participants expressed frustration over the lack of clear guidance, leading to poorly defined boundaries regarding the appropriateness of content and timing in delivering meaningful RSE for CYPwLD, alongside a general lack of clarity in the task at hand. Without a clear boundary to contain RSE teaching, the participants may have found themselves navigating uncertain terrain, unsure of where their responsibilities begin and end. This lack of clarity led to feelings of confusion, potentially contributing to teachers' feelings of anxiety and doubt regarding their competence in this study. This highlights the importance of clarity in boundary and task, as neglecting it can create chaotic and confusing organisational cultures that hinder the task. This notion is also reflected within prior literature, where the lack of RSE having a compulsory status for CYPwLD also demonstrates a lack of clearly defined boundaries concerning roles and responsibilities, which may have contributed to the displacement or avoidance issues discussed in these studies (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011).

Despite these difficulties, all of the teachers in this study did willingly and enthusiastically embrace their “role” in delivering RSE. The concept of ‘role’ involves the duties, responsibilities, and expectations associated with a particular position or function within a group or organisation (Green & Molenkamp, 2005). Roles can be formal, with defined job descriptions and assigned by authority figures, or informal, arising from individuals' actions and interactions within the group (Green & Molenkamp, 2005). Participants' enthusiasm and willingness to take up their role may be because it represented one aspect that was relatively well-defined in relation

to RSE, especially when compared with previous literature (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011).

This ambiguity was further exacerbated by the challenge of 'authority'. 'Authority' can be described as the "conferred power to perform a service" (Heifetz, 1994, p. 57). It can be formal, granted by a group or individual and defined by job descriptions, or it can be personal, influenced by individual characteristics. Effective authority involves clear definition, appropriate uptake, and the necessary resources to execute tasks effectively. However, in this study, even regulatory bodies like Ofsted and borough experts grappled with difficulties in providing definitive answers to schools.

Additionally, in the absence of guidance and supportive authority Rosie and Danielle subsequently were forced to take up responsibilities that felt "beyond [their] authority" (Rosie, p. 4), particularly in making substantial, potentially life-altering, decisions about what level of RSE students should access. This situation not only created challenges in ensuring equitable access to RSE but also has clearly highlighted unresolved issues of equality within the education system in relation to RSE.

Without clear guidance or support, teachers found themselves navigating uncharted territory, unsure of how to effectively fulfil their responsibility while trying their best to follow vague guidance. This highlights the importance of clearly defined authority and the need for educators to have the necessary support to provide meaningful and appropriate RSE.

5.2.3. GET 3: Carrying Emotional Loads

While previous literature did acknowledge the role of safeguarding within the context of RSE, the focus was more around the significance of RSE as vital in supporting students' safety, as previously discussed, rather than the emotional experience for teacher when managing safeguarding concerns (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023; Finlay et al., 2015; Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Ogur et al., 2023; Rohleder, 2010; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011). Borawska-Charko et al. (2023), for example, did find that teachers discussed the increased likelihood of safeguarding concerns being raised within RSE sessions however there was no consideration as to the emotional impact upon teachers. Similarly, Janice reflected on the increased likelihood of safeguarding concerns coming up within lessons, and further expanded on the emotional weight of this alongside Danielle and Rosie who also reflected on the emotionality of the subject in relation to safeguarding. This emotional weight can be understood through the lens of psychodynamic theory, specifically the concept of containment (Bion, 1984).

Bion (1984) discusses the concept of container/contained, which refers to how a caregiver takes on an infant's distress, later returning these feelings in a more manageable form, such as through comforting words or actions. In the context of RSE, teachers often serve as these figures for students who may be grappling with complex emotional experiences related to their personal experiences which they may not have fully processed. Teachers need to effectively contain these unprocessed emotions, especially when discussing sensitive topics like safeguarding to support their students in processing these feelings. In doing so it is important to create a safe and nurturing environment where students feel supported and

understood, reflected in Rosie's idea of the "very safe [school] environment" (Rosie, p. 23). By containing the emotional distress of students, teachers help them process and make sense of their experiences. However, the emotional weight of containment can take a toll on teachers, as they navigate the complexities of safeguarding concerns while also managing their own emotional responses.

In light of this, Janice and Danielle emphasised the importance of offloading in managing these emotional challenges. While Danielle finds some solace in her SLT, Janice highlighted the stark reality faced by many teachers: the lack of adequate support structures. Janice shared the struggle of carrying the weight of safeguarding concerns without designated debriefing mechanisms or professional supervision. Supervision, as outlined by Page and Wosket (2001), serves as a tool for containing teachers' emotional experiences and providing a structured process for navigating the unexpected aspects of their work, such as safeguarding. Drawing from Bion's (1984) container/contained concept, which emphasises the reciprocal nature of containment, supervision enables teachers to feel contained themselves so that they can effectively provide containment for the CYP they support. Thus, Janice and Danielle's experiences highlight the critical need for accessible support systems, such as supervision, to safeguard not only the emotional well-being of students but also that of their teachers.

When teachers lack adequate support, especially in terms of emotional containment through mechanisms like supervision, there is an undeniable risk of burnout and negative wellbeing. A recent survey from Education Support highlighted that 89% of teachers experienced poor mental health due to their work and 35% of teachers felt

that they had symptoms which could be related to burnout (Education Support, 2023b). Interestingly, within the context of the present research, recruitment was much more challenging than the researcher had anticipated. Although there was a larger expression of interest, a total of nine individuals, five of the potential participants subsequently withdrew from participation with one of those providing reasons related to the demands of their role and the subsequent limited mental capacity / energy. Thus, it appears that the need for adequate support is ever more crucial.

5.2.4. GET 4: Seeking Support in Solitude

In the GET 'seeking support in solitude,' participants expressed a sense of isolation and a lack of support within the broader education system. They described feeling disconnected from external services and harboured a sense of resentment towards them, with Danielle sharing that interactions with external systems had “shocked [her] to the core” (Danielle p. 15). This feeling stemmed from experiences of these services not truly understanding the unique challenges they faced.

Previous literature did find systemic challenges in relation to RSE, however they were of a differing nature to the challenges experienced in this study. For example, Rohleder (2010) and Wilkenfeld & Ballan (2011) found that external systems were resistant to RSE, fearing that it would actually be problematic for PwLD. Notably, these studies were some of the oldest selected within the review, which may have contributed to this finding. In the present study, while there wasn't external resistance or outright opposition to RSE for CYPwLD, there were systemic barriers of a different

nature. These barriers manifested as feelings of isolation and being “forgotten” (Jennifer, p. 16) within wider educational systems. Unlike overt resistance, these barriers were more subtle but undeniably impactful, creating barriers to the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD. The teachers' sense of isolation and lack of recognition within broader educational structures highlights a need for systemic support and recognition of their role in delivering inclusive RSE. Earlier literature also highlighted teachers' struggles with the absence of external support, including limited training opportunities, guidelines, supervision, and updated research (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Ogur et al., 2023). This therefore aligns with the findings of this study, indicating a wider sense of teachers feeling somewhat isolated in their experiences of navigating RSE for CYPwLD.

In the context of these findings, Social Identity Theory (SIT; Tajfel & Turner, 2001) provides valuable insights into teachers' experiences of isolation and resentment towards external services. According to SIT, individuals derive their identity and sense of belonging from the groups they belong to, often viewing members of their own group more positively while harbouring some suspicion or distrust towards outsiders. In this study, teachers appeared to have formed a cohesive in-group, characterised by a sense of solidarity and shared understanding of their challenges. This sense of shared experience was evident within their individual school systems, yet there was also a sense of awareness of other specialist settings existing outside their immediate circles. It was as if these other group members were perceived as distant, almost unattainable entities, despite their shared identity.

Conversely, external agents, such as Ofsted, mainstream schools, and social services, were perceived as out-groups due to perceived differences in understanding and priorities (Tajfel & Turner, 2001). The ongoing experiences of teachers, including training sessions and interactions with social services, further reinforced this perception of divergence between their schools and external services. These experiences created feelings of resentment and frustration, as teachers may have felt that their needs were undervalued or overlooked by external systems. By highlighting the dynamics of group identity and intergroup relations, SIT helps to provide an understanding of the sense of marginalisation experienced by these teachers as a sub-group within the broader education system (Tajfel & Turner, 2001).

However, a further question arises: Why are external systems overlooking the unique needs of special schools, particularly in relation to RSE? When it comes to the intersection of complex needs and discussions around RSE, social systems may face a double challenge.

Firstly, Goodley's (2017) examination of societal responses to disability highlights the influence of ableism, which encompasses deep-seated misconceptions and prejudices about disability within social systems. Ableism operates as a systemic barrier, hindering the recognition and accommodation of the unique needs of individuals with profound and complex needs. This deep-rooted ableism within societal structures may contribute to discomfort or anxiety and subsequent avoidance when these systems attempt to address the needs of individuals with disabilities (Nario-Redmond, 2019). Secondly, discussions about sexuality, particularly in the context of individuals with disabilities, are often filled with societal

taboos and misconceptions (Esmail et al., 2010; Goodley, 2017). When these two realities intersect, societal structures may simply feel overwhelmed, creating a level of anxiety and discomfort that they struggle to manage. As a result, these topics may be avoided altogether, leaving participants feeling isolated and forgotten in their journey of navigating the subject.

In relation to social defence theory, this phenomenon reflects the notion that societal systems can exhibit defensive mechanisms when confronted with challenging or uncomfortable realities, especially in times of change (Bain, 1998; Jaques, 1985). The avoidance of discussions on RSE within the education system may be seen as a form of social defence, wherein systems unconsciously avoid topics that create discomfort or anxiety, thus creating a cycle of neglect and potentially leading teachers to feel isolated and unsupported within the wider education system.

5.2.5. GET 5: Working with Diverse Minds

In the fifth and final GET, 'working with diverse minds,' teachers shared their experiences of delivering RSE to students whose cognitive processes vary widely. This diversity in thinking styles introduced complexities, as students and teachers often perceived and processed information differently. Janice, Jennifer, and Rosie discussed this topic, with Jennifer highlighting the challenge posed by students' tendency towards 'black and white' thinking in a subject that inherently deals with the complexities of relationships, which are anything but "black and white" (Jennifer, p. 19).

This finding was consistent with previous research, with a teacher in Borawska-Charko et al.'s (2023) study emphasising the difficulties around teaching about social rules which are constantly changing depending on circumstance. This finding is very similar to Jennifer's experience of teaching a student about not talking to strangers which wasn't applicable within a hospitality work based setting, leading her to rethink her teaching approach. Additionally, Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al.'s (2017) and Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis's (2019) participants also found that students had difficulty transferring information to different contexts.

In this study, Janice and Jennifer's reflections on their own experience of neurodiversity stood out as a unique aspect not previously highlighted in the literature. Janice and Jennifer's acknowledgment of their own neurodiversity brought a personal dimension to their teaching practice. This aspect was particularly significant as it underscored their ability to empathise with their students on a deeper level, understanding their unique cognitive processes and challenges. The absence of similar insights in previous literature could suggest a shift in societal attitudes towards neurodiversity.

One possible explanation for this shift could be the increasing understanding and appreciation of neurodiversity in modern society, driven by the emergence of neurodiversity as a social justice movement (Kapp et al., 2019; Leadbitter et al., 2021). As awareness grows and stigmas surrounding neurodiversity are tackled, individuals like Janice and Jennifer may feel more empowered to embrace and openly discuss their neurodivergent identities. This empowerment allows them to leverage their differences as strengths rather than limitations, enabling them to

connect more authentically with their students and advocate for inclusive education practices. Consequently, their reflections on neurodiversity not only enrich our understanding of RSE in the context of CYPwLD but also may highlight broader societal trends towards acceptance and celebration of neurodiversity.

In the context of diversity, creating a culture of acceptance and understanding becomes particularly crucial. Janice, for instance, recognised the importance of fostering an environment where students feel accepted and valued for their differences. Moreover, Rosie and Jennifer also observed their students' remarkable openness and acceptance when discussing topics related to RSE. Despite societal norms often associating these discussions with embarrassment or taboo (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023), the students demonstrated a refreshing lack of inhibition and stigma surrounding these topics. This indicates a level of acceptance and inclusivity within the classroom environment, where differences in thinking and perspectives can be embraced rather than marginalised.

Interestingly, this does differ somewhat from previous research where RSE topics related to LGBTQ+ communities and different types of relationships were not always received in such an accepting manner by students (Borawska-Charko et al., 2023). However, in the present research, Jennifer and Janice both discussed the importance of teaching about diverse relationships and found that students were “not bothered” (Janice, p. 17) by difference. Additionally, Rosie found that her students didn't seem to classify people by gender in the same way that neurotypical people do, which made her question her own values and those pushed within society.

Janice felt it was important to nurture this culture of acceptance by avoiding reinforcing students' feelings of difference. Janice felt that teaching content too far removed from students' lived experiences could potentially exacerbate these feelings. While not explicitly linked to this theme, other teachers' concerns about 'getting it wrong' also seemed connected to this notion, albeit with a greater emphasis on the ambiguity of guidance provided. This highlights a shared concern among teachers about ensuring that the content and approach to teaching are appropriately tailored to the students' needs and experiences, thereby creating a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

In the context of students' experiences, the theory of cognitive dissonance can shed light on Janice's concern of internal conflicts or dissonance when they encounter information or experiences that contradict their existing understanding (Festinger, 1957). Janice's emphasis on teaching content aligned with students' lived experiences may reflect an attempt to minimise cognitive dissonance among students. By presenting information that resonates with their reality, Janice aims to reduce the discomfort students might feel when confronted with concepts or ideas that seem distant or unfamiliar (Festinger, 1957). This approach helps to align their beliefs with their experiences, reducing the cognitive dissonance that could arise from discrepancies between what they are taught and what they know to be true in their lives.

The Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD; Vygotsky & Cole, 1978) is also relevant in understanding how teachers like Janice approach teaching content aligned with students' lived experiences. The ZPD refers to the range of tasks that a learner can

perform with the assistance of a more knowledgeable other, such as a teacher (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). In Janice's case, she tailors her teaching to match the zone where students can grasp concepts comfortably with guidance. By focusing on content within students' lived experiences, Janice operates within their ZPD, ensuring that the material is neither too easy nor too difficult for them to understand. This approach allows Janice to scaffold students learning effectively, providing guidance as needed while gradually introducing more complex ideas.

Janice's efforts to avoid teaching content too far from students' lived experiences align with Vygotsky's emphasis on the importance of meaningful and contextually relevant learning experiences (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978). By basing teaching in familiar contexts, teachers can ensure that students can make meaningful connections between new information and their existing knowledge, facilitating deeper understanding (Vygotsky & Cole, 1978).

Finally, the subtheme 'finding what works' was centred around teachers' experience of building relationships with their students to ensure they were providing the best support possible. This involved investing time and effort to truly understand each student on a personal level. Through their investment towards each individual student, teachers sought to identify specific needs, preferences, and learning styles. By fostering these relationships, teachers were able to tailor their approaches and to best support the diverse needs of their students.

John Hattie's (2009) meta analyses on educational achievement has provided insights into the factors that have the greatest impact on learning and achievement.

Hattie's research findings align with the current study, with Hattie finding a significant impact of teacher-student relationships on student outcomes, suggesting that these relationships have a greater influence on achievement than factors such as socio-economic status or specific intervention programmes (Hattie, 2009). Similarly, the subtheme emphasises the importance of teachers' investment in building strong relationships with their students, as this lays the foundations for meaningful learning. By understanding students, teachers can adapt their approaches to better meet individual needs, ultimately contributing to improved outcomes.

Both Hattie's (2009) meta analyses and the findings of the current study emphasise the role of positive teacher-student relationships in promoting student success. This study further shows the significance of relationships within specialist settings, where CYP have such diverse needs that require highly individualised support. Taking the time to develop deep connections with students becomes even more crucial in these contexts, as it allows educators to better understand individual needs. Ultimately, the subtheme highlighted the importance of teacher-student relationships as foundational to creating effective and inclusive learning environments within RSE for CYPwLD.

5.3. Strengths and Limitations

In this section, the study's methodological rigour and potential areas for improvement are critically examined. These insights offer considerations for the interpretation and generalisability of the findings. The study's adherence to markers of high-quality IPA reflect a rigorous approach to understanding teachers' experiences in delivering RSE

for CYPwLD. However, limitations such as sample size and challenges inherent in the interview process emphasise the need for cautious interpretation and avenues for future research.

5.3.1. Generalisability and Sample Considerations

One of the primary limitations of this study is its small sample size, a common critique of IPA (Smith et al., 2022). Due to the limited number of participants, the findings may not be easily generalisable to a wider population of teachers working with CYPwLD. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge that participants volunteered for the research, and their evident passion for the subject may have influenced their decision to participate. Consequently, the sample may not be representative of all teachers' experiences of RSE for CYPwLD. It is plausible that some teachers hold different views or may not feel comfortable participating in interview-based research, potentially introducing bias and further limiting the generalisability of the findings.

Another notable limitation of this study is the variation in roles among the participating teachers. While all participants were involved in delivering RSE for CYPwLD, their specific roles within their respective schools varied, with some having roles as class teachers and others holding positions within SLT. IPA typically seeks homogeneity in samples to enable exploration of a shared experience (Smith et al., 2022), but the diversity of roles among participants in this study may have introduced some variability in their experiences. These differences in roles could have

influenced participants' experiences of delivering RSE, potentially reducing the homogeneity of the sample and complicating the interpretation of findings.

It's important to note that while this study focused specifically on RSE for CYPwLD, teachers often discussed the additional needs of their students, such as ASC. This scope beyond the primary aims may have somewhat confounded the depth of insight specifically related to RSE for CYPwLD. However, it's worth recognising that this tendency to address a spectrum of needs is likely a shared experience among many special school teachers, who routinely support with students across a range of needs in the UK (Scope, 2024).

5.3.2. Interviews

Navigating an unstructured interview format posed a challenge in maintaining researcher neutrality, particularly given the depth of knowledge acquired through prior research in the area. As the interviewer, it was difficult to prevent personal biases or preconceived notions from influencing the interview process. Despite efforts to remain neutral and open-minded, the inherent understanding of the topic could have subtly influenced the framing of questions or the interpretation of participants' responses. This challenge highlights the importance of reflexivity and awareness of the researcher's potential impact on the interview dynamics.

5.3.3. Markers of High Quality IPA

In this study, the presentation of findings aimed to align closely to the principles outlined by Nizza et al. (2021). Firstly, regarding the construction of a compelling unfolding narrative, the narrative was presented in a manner reflective of hermeneutics, where the broader contextual 'whole' experiences of teachers delivering RSE for CYPwLD are first explored. The presentation of findings begins by delving into the overarching contextual and systemic experiences surrounding RSE, yet, as the narrative progresses, it transitions into the more specific within-school 'part' experiences of teachers. Participant quotes are interspersed with descriptive passages, allowing readers to immerse themselves in the lived experiences of teachers' delivery on RSE for CYPwLD. Moreover, by blending participant quotes with analytical interpretations, the study seeks to strike a balance between providing first-hand accounts and offering interpretive insights into these experiences.

Additionally, the presentation of participants' narratives aimed to develop a vigorous experiential and existential account, as emphasised by Nizza et al. (2021). The aim was to go beyond surface-level descriptions of events and uncover existential themes within participants' narratives. For instance, during discussions about interactions with external services, participants often expressed a feeling of separation, evoking an 'us and them' dynamic. This highlighted a perceived gap between their understanding of the needs of CYPwLDs regarding RSE and that of external professionals. The participants in this study demonstrated thoughtfulness and reflexivity, having already engaged in a significant process of sense-making regarding their experiences. This aligns with the principles of double hermeneutics,

where both the researcher and participants contribute to the interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon.

Moreover, participants' words were thoroughly analysed, following the guidelines set by Nizza et al. (2021). Rather than just presenting participant quotes at face value, their meanings were explored, considering the subtleties in language, tone, and metaphor. Throughout the presentation of findings, quotes were accompanied by interpretive insights, showing a commitment to exploring the unique depth of each participant's experience. The analysis process was transparently documented in the appendices (see appendix L). By connecting the language used by participants with the broader context of the data, the interpretation captured the complexity of participant experiences, reflecting the ideographic essence of IPA. This thorough approach facilitated a cohesive interpretation that reflected the richness and depth of participant narratives, in line with the hermeneutic nature of IPA.

Finally, attention was paid to both convergence and divergence in participants' experiences, aligning with the principles outlined by Nizza et al. (2021). The analysis highlighted not only the commonalities shared among participants but also the unique aspects of their individual experiences (e.g. Janice and Rosie's positive framing of ambiguous guidance). This was achieved by presenting contrasting quotes and experiences, allowing for an exploration of how participants interpreted and understood similar experiences based on their distinct perspectives and backgrounds. By cycling between individual accounts and the broader context, the research provided insights into the varying ways in which participants experienced their role in delivering RSE for CYPwLD.

5.4. Implications

The findings of this study provide significant implications for practitioners, policymakers, and researchers in shaping the development of RSE for CYPwLD.

This section will explore the practical implications for enhancing RSE provision and highlight avenues for future research to further understanding and improve outcomes for CYPwLD.

5.4.1. Implications for Practice

5.4.1.1. National Policy

The implications drawn from this study suggest a pressing need for clearer and more comprehensive RSE guidance at a national level to support teachers in effectively delivering RSE to CYPwLD.

The findings of this study suggest that current RSE guidance quite simply lacks an appropriate level of guidance necessary to effectively address the needs of CYPwLD. These teachers' experiences have revealed a need for guidance that provides more explicit direction on curriculum content, whilst simultaneously allowing flexibility for adaptation to meet individual student needs. It should outline suggested content and teaching approaches aligned with different developmental stages, ensuring that teachers have a framework to refer to. For instance, the guidance could recommend age-appropriate topics and learning objectives tailored to specific

developmental milestones, such as early childhood, adolescence, and young adulthood.

However, such guidance should additionally emphasise that it serves as a flexible framework rather than a rigid guide, recognising that teachers may need to adapt content and teaching strategies based on individual student needs, abilities, and preferences. This approach acknowledges the variability among students with LD and empowers teachers to make informed decisions about curriculum implementation.

By offering detailed suggestions for curriculum content and teaching strategies tailored to developmental stages, a clearer guidance would help to support teachers in effectively addressing the diverse learning needs of students with disabilities. It would provide a framework for teachers, providing some clarity in the complexities innate to RSE delivery.

5.4.1.2. International Considerations

The findings of this study also have intriguing implications for education systems in different countries, particularly regarding the role of teachers and schools in delivering RSE. The study suggests that making RSE a compulsory component of the curriculum may help alleviate some anxieties among teachers found in wider literature (Rohleder, 2010), as it establishes a clear mandate for addressing these topics within schools. Unlike in contexts where RSE is not mandated (Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis, 2019; Nelson et al., 2020; Wilkenfeld & Ballan, 2011), teachers in

this study did not attempt to displace or avoid their role in delivering RSE and felt personally responsible for ensuring its effective implementation.

Given these insights, policymakers in other countries may consider reviewing their approach to RSE within the curriculum, especially from a human rights perspective. By making RSE a compulsory element of the curriculum, education systems can ensure that all students do have access to RSE, independent of professional viewpoints, which is essential for supporting health and wellbeing.

5.4.1.3. Supervision

The findings of this study emphasise the pressing need for teacher supervision, particularly in the context of RSE for CYPwLD. While the concept of teacher supervision is far from novel, its widespread implementation continues to remain limited (Gibbs & Miller, 2014; Hawkins & McMahon, 2020; Murray, 2022). This study sheds some light on the depth of challenges teachers face in providing RSE tailored to the needs of CYPwLD, which could risk impacting upon wellbeing if not unsupported.

Special school teachers, in particular, likely would benefit from supervision across various aspects of their role, not limited to RSE delivery. However, the study suggests that dedicated RSE supervision groups could be a valuable tool. EPs and other education or healthcare professionals are well-positioned to facilitate such groups, offering a platform for teachers to discuss challenges, share best practices, and receive guidance specific to RSE delivery for CYPwLD. By facilitating a supportive and collaborative environment, these supervision groups could enhance

teacher confidence and competence in their role, ultimately benefiting the students they support.

5.4.1.4. Training

Interestingly, none of the teachers in the study reported having received formal training specifically focused on delivering RSE for CYPwLD despite having actively searched for opportunities. This notable gap highlights an urgent need for training opportunities in the area, especially considering that RSE is now compulsory within the curriculum meaning that teachers *need* to have support in its delivery.

However, it is also important for training opportunities to be designed collaboratively with teachers to ensure that such opportunities are both relevant and considerate to teachers lived experiences. By involving teachers in the development of training programmes, teachers can provide insights into the unique challenges they encounter in their day-to-day practice alongside real world examples of successful strategies. This collaborative approach can help tailor training content to address specific issues and equip teachers with the knowledge and skills necessary to effectively deliver RSE for CYPwLD.

Such training opportunities could be offered by LAs or EPs within their respective services in conjunction with teachers. Given that training has been identified as one of the five core functions of the EP role, EPs can be considered well positioned to provide such opportunities (Scottish Executive, 2002). By providing training at the local level, LAs and EPs can ensure that the content is tailored to the specific needs and contexts of schools and educators within their jurisdiction. This localised

approach would help to enhance the relevance of training, ensuring that is meaningful for teachers in delivering high-quality RSE for CYPwLD.

5.4.1.5. Networking

The teachers in this study experienced a sense of isolation in their roles, particularly concerning RSE within specialist education. Since most LAs only have a limited number of special schools, teachers may lack opportunities for collaboration and sharing of best practice. To address this challenge, it would be beneficial to establish networking initiatives that enable special schools to connect and exchange ideas. These networking platforms could facilitate the sharing of successful strategies, resources, and approaches to RSE education for CYPwLD. By creating a community of practitioners, such approaches may mitigate feelings of isolation and provide avenues for development in RSE teaching.

5.4.2. Implications for Research

In terms of implications for future research, it would be beneficial to conduct more extensive studies exploring teachers' experiences of delivering RSE for CYPwLD. Due to the small sample size, it is highly possible that there are a broader range of experiences among teachers that were not captured in this research. Furthermore, it's important to acknowledge that the participants in this study were all highly passionate and enthusiastic about RSE for CYPwLD, which likely influenced their willingness to participate. However, it's possible that not all teachers share the same level of enthusiasm in delivering RSE for CYPwLD. Future research should aim to capture a more diverse range of perspectives by employing methods that are

accessible to a wider pool of participants. One potential approach could involve utilising surveys or questionnaires that allow teachers to share their experiences more anonymously. This anonymity may encourage a breadth of responses, particularly from those who may feel less comfortable expressing their views in a face-to-face interview setting. By gathering data from a more diverse sample of teachers, future research can offer a more comprehensive understanding of the challenges, successes, and support needs associated with delivering RSE for CYPwLD.

In addition, the recruitment process for this study revealed some challenges, with a significant number of individuals expressing interest but ultimately not participating. This discrepancy between interest and actual participation may reflect underlying factors such as burnout or time constraints among SEN teachers. Exploring these factors in future research could provide valuable insights into the barriers that teachers face in engaging with research, particularly those related to sensitive topics like RSE for CYPwLD. Understanding the reasons behind non-participation can inform strategies to enhance recruitment efforts and ensure a more representative sample in future studies. Additionally, investigating the impact of burnout or workload on teachers' willingness to engage with research can shed light on the broader context in which these experiences occur and highlight areas for targeted support. By addressing these methodological challenges and exploring the factors influencing participation, future research can strengthen the validity and applicability of findings in relation to RSE for CYPwLD.

Additionally, future research could explore the actual practices and delivery of strategies and interventions used by specialist provisions when implementing RSE for CYPwLD. While this study provided valuable insights into teachers' lived experiences, there remains a gap in understanding the specific strategies that are helpful in supporting RSE for CYPwLD. By conducting research that focuses on the practical aspects of RSE delivery, such as curriculum implementation, teaching methods, and resource development, we can ensure that the evidence base is kept up to date. This research can provide valuable guidance for schools, helping them make informed decisions about how best to support the needs of CYPwLD.

Finally, future research could explore the experiences of CYPwLD, as well as their caregivers, in relation to RSE, particularly in light of the contextually recent legislative change (DfE, 2019). By examining these experiences in the context of recent legislative change, researchers can consider the impact of policy changes on the provision of RSE for CYPwLD and identify areas for improvement.

5.5. Dissemination of Findings

The dissemination of findings will involve sharing the results with participants, offering opportunities for discussion if needed to ensure their perspectives are accurately represented. Additionally, the findings will be presented during the researcher's placement EPS service development day, where EPs can engage with the results and discuss potential implications for practice. Plans are underway to begin implementing some of the recommendations derived from the findings to enhance RSE delivery for CYPwLD within the borough. Furthermore, there is

consideration for writing up the research for publication in a peer-reviewed journal to contribute to the broader academic discourse on this topic.

To broaden the reach and impact of this research, there are also plans to leverage social media platforms, YouTube channels, and other digital methods to disseminate the findings. These channels provide an opportunity to engage a wider audience, including teachers, parents, and young people, who may find the subject matter highly relevant and informative. Utilising these modern dissemination methods can help ensure that the research findings reach those who can benefit most from the insights.

5.6. Conclusion

This study aimed to explore how secondary school teachers are experiencing the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD in light of recent legislative changes which made RSE mandatory in all schools in England from September 2020, addressing a clear gap within the literature identified within a systematically informed literature review. Interviews with four teachers were analysed using IPA to answer the following research question:

‘What is it like for school staff to deliver RSE for CYPwLD within secondary specialist provisions?’

Five GETs were identified within the analyses process which capture the groups experience, that is: RSE is vital, implementing ambiguous guidance, carrying emotional loads, seeking support in solitude, and working with diverse minds.

At its core, the study highlights the fundamental importance of RSE for CYPwLD, with participants unanimously advocating for its vital role in empowering students and promoting their wellbeing. The findings reveal a consensus among teachers regarding the transformative impact of RSE on the lives of their students, emphasising its significance in supporting CYPwLD to understand themselves and have the skills necessary to not only develop relationships, but even more vitally to keep themselves safe. Furthermore, providing RSE has created a space to promote acceptance and belonging, where teachers and students alike learned from one another.

However, supporting students' rights does not come without challenge. Teaching RSE in any context is not a simple task, and additional layers of complexity are added when working with diverse needs. Despite their unwavering dedication to supporting students' rights, teachers are finding themselves grappling with ambiguous guidance. This ambiguity has forced them into difficult positions where they must make decisions that, despite their best intentions, may inadvertently compromise principles of equality and inclusivity. The Equality Act (2010) protects individuals from discrimination based on protected characteristics, including disability. Therefore, any actions or decisions that result in unequal opportunity or limited access to comprehensive RSE for CYPwLD could be seen as an issue of equality which needs careful consideration. In addition to these challenges, teachers

face the emotionally demanding nature of delivering RSE for CYPwLD, where safeguarding concerns and strong emotions are likely to arise.

Yet, teachers find themselves navigating these challenges without adequate support from external systems who do not understand the needs of specialist provisions, leaving these teachers feeling isolated and frustrated. This highlights a systemic issue where the unique challenges faced by teachers in specialist provisions may be overlooked or misunderstood by broader educational structures, exacerbating the difficulties they face in delivering effective RSE for CYPwLD.

Thus, these findings highlight the need for policymakers and education professionals to support the unique needs of specialist settings in providing RSE for CYPwLD, ensuring that adequate resources, tailored guidance, individual support, and training opportunities are provided to support teachers to deliver meaningful and inclusive RSE that upholds the rights and wellbeing of CYPwLD.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Literature search tracking

Completed on 10.11.2023		Total no. of papers							
Search No.	Search terms		Date 2010-2023	Written in English ¹	Academic Journals	Peer reviewed	Full text available	Duplicates removed	Reading titles and abstract
1.	teachers OR educators	2,927,868	1,185,635	1,141,047	743,058	719,008	500,704	-	-
2.	“relationship and sex education” OR RSE OR “sex education” OR sex*	1,111,282	493,532	473,623	349,174	344,532	226,427	-	-
3.	“learning difficulty” OR “learning disability” OR “developmental disability” OR “disorder of intellectual development”	116,944	45,041	43,880	36,984	36,426	28,859	-	-
4.	“lived experience” OR experience* OR view* OR perspective	3,795,379	1,963,050	1,897,726	1,274,964	1,250,259	818,777	-	-
Combining searches (Search with ‘AND’)									

¹ Refined using the ‘language’ filter, by selecting ‘English’.

5.	Searches 1, 2, 3 and 4 combined using AND	5,206	2,972	2,922	2,703	2,651	2,644	-	-
<p>Term 'relationship' in search 2 removed as high frequency of research studies utilise the term 'relationship' e.g. correlational studies, which subsequently resulted in a large number of results with high irrelevance to the research question.</p> <p>Term sex* in search 2 removed due to a high frequency of research studies using the term to explain biological sex of participants, subsequently resulting in a large number of results with high irrelevance to the research question.</p>									
6.	RSE OR "sex education"	35,774	15,310	14,709	11,275	11,099	8,839	-	-
<p>Combining searches (Search with 'AND')</p>									
7.	Searched 1, 3, 4 and 6 combined using AND	271	271	267	204	196	194	176	-
<p>Completed on 15.11.2023</p> <p>Expander "Also search within the full text of the articles" removed to increase frequency of articles with high relevance to the review question</p> <p>"full text available" limiter removed due to possibilities of identifying full text elsewhere (e.g. using openAthens)</p>									
8.	teacher OR educator OR "special educat**"	1,837,590	709,153	679,765	473,071	460,787	-	-	-
9.	"sex* education"	25,069	10,314	10,025	8,313	8,223	-	-	-
10.	"learning difficulty" OR "learning disability" OR "developmental disability" OR "disorder of intellectual development"	93,879	30,705	29,951	24,674	24,325	-	-	-
11.	Experience OR view OR perspective	2,507,616	1,353,030	1,305,413	990,203	981,914	-	-	-
<p>Combining searches (Search with 'AND')</p>									

12.	Searched 8, 9, 10 and 11 combined using AND	183	183	183	183	183	-	-	-
Search terms for 'learning difficulty' subject mapping revised based on search results									
13.	"learning difficulty" OR "learning disability" OR "intellectual disability" OR "developmental disability"	138,844	53,436	52,097	45,060	44,530	-	-	-
Combining searches (Search with 'AND')									
14.	Searched 8, 9, 11 and 13 using AND	46	36	32	23	23	-	-	7
Completed on 09.04.2024									
15	Searched 8, 9, 11 and 13 using AND	64	50	48	37	37	-	8	7

Appendix B – Studies excluded/included within the literature review

No.	Paper title, year and author:	Screened	Used for final review (yes/no):	Reason for exclusion:
1.	Strnadová, I., Loblinzk, J., & Danker, J. (2021). Importance of sex education for a successful transition to life after school: Experiences of high school girls with intellectual disability.	Title	No	Participant group
2.	Frawley, P., & O’Shea, A. (2020). “Nothing about us without us”: sex education by and for people with intellectual disability in Australia.	Title and abstract	No	Participant group
3.	Nelson, B., Odberg Pettersson, K., & Emmelin, M. (2020). Experiences of teaching sexual and reproductive health to students with intellectual disabilities.	Full text	Yes	-
4.	Schmidt EK, Dougherty M, Robek N, et al. Usability, Usefulness, and Desirability of Learning Activities for Sexual Health Education for Individuals with Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities.	Title and abstract	No	Focused on intervention outcomes
5.	Frawley, P., & Bigby, C. (2014). “I’m in their shoes”: Experiences of peer educators in sexuality and relationship education.	Title and abstract	No	Participant group

6.	Frank, K., & Sandman, L. (2021). Parents as Primary Sexuality Educators for Adolescents and Adults With Down Syndrome: A Mixed Methods Examination of the Home B.A.S.E for Intellectual Disabilities Workshop.	Title	No	Focused on intervention outcomes Participant group
7.	Girgin-Büyükbayraktar, Ç., Konuk-Er, R., & Kesici, S. (2017). According to the Opinions of Teachers of Individuals with Intellectual Disabilities: What Are the Sexual Problems of Students with Special Education Needs? How Should Sexual Education Be Provided for Them?	Full text	Yes	-
8.	Ang, C. T., & Lee, L. W. (2017). Psychometric characteristics of a sexuality education survey for teachers of secondary school students with learning disabilities in Malaysia.	Title and abstract	No	Focused on survey development, rather than exploring views directly
9.	Wilkenfeld, B. F., & Ballan, M. S. (2011). Educators' attitudes and beliefs towards the sexuality of individuals with developmental disabilities.	Full text	Yes	
10.	Rohleder, P. (2010). Educators' ambivalence and managing anxiety in providing sex education for people with learning disabilities.	Full text	Yes	

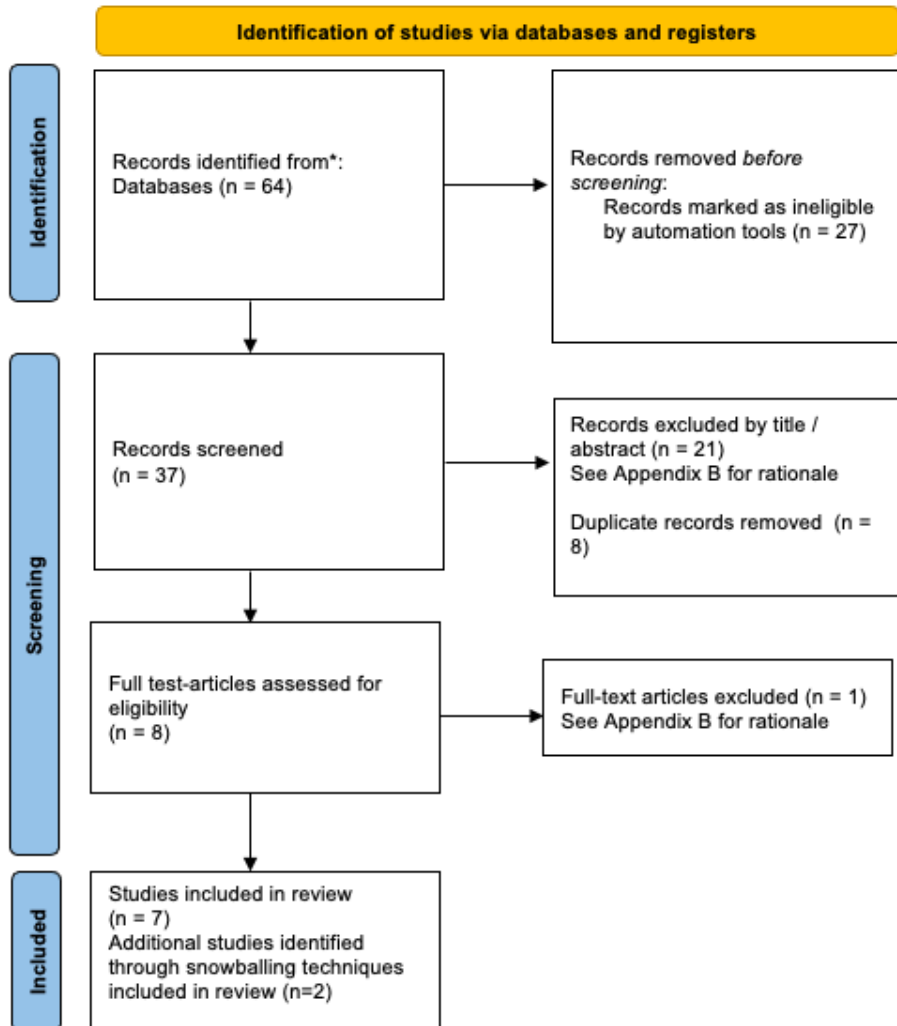
11.	Ogur, C., Olcay, S., & Baloglu, M. (2023). An international study: Teachers' opinions about individuals with developmental disabilities regarding sexuality education.	Full text	Yes	
12.	Guyen, D. (2021). Rural Families' Thoughts about Sexual Development of Their Adolescents with Neurodevelopmental Disorders.	Title and abstract	No	Participant group
13.	Shuib, N. binti, Yasin, M. H. bin M., & bin Tahar, M. M. (2022). The Relationship between Teachers' Knowledge, Practices, Vision, Attitudes and Commitment in Teaching Sexuality Education for Students with Intellectual Disability.	Full text	Yes	
14.	Eyres, R. M., Hunter, W. C., Happel-Parkins, A., Williamson, R. L., & Casey, L. B. (2022). Important Conversations: Exploring Parental Experiences in Providing Sexuality Education for Their Children with Intellectual Disabilities.	Title	No	Participant group
15.	Löfgren-Mårtenson, C., & Ouis, P. (2019). "We Need 'Culture-Bridges': Professionals' Experiences of Sex Education for Pupils with Intellectual Disabilities in a Multicultural Society.	Full text	Yes	
16.	Murray, B. L. (2019). Sexual Health Education for Adolescents with Developmental Disabilities.	Title and abstract	No	Focused on intervention development

17.	Cwirynkalo, K., & Zyta, A. (2019). Self-Advocates with Intellectual Disabilities Talk about Love and Relationships: A Focus-Group Research Report.	Title and abstract	No	Participant group
18.	Kammes, R. R., Douglas, S. N., Maas, M. K., & Black, R. S. (2020). Parental support for sexuality education and expression among adults with an intellectual disability.	Title and abstract	No	Participant group Not focusing on RSE for CYPwLD
19.	Grove, L., Morrison-Beedy, D., Kirby, R., & Hess, J. (2018). The birds, bees, and special needs: Making evidence-based sex education accessible for adolescents with intellectual disabilities.	Full text	No	Focused on curriculum evaluation
20.	Strnadová, I., Danker, J., & Carter, A. (2022). Scoping review on sex education for high school-aged students with intellectual disability and/or on the autism spectrum: Parents', teachers' and students' perspectives, attitudes and experiences.	Title and abstract	No	Review paper
21.	Akhtar, S. (2018). Sexuality education in girls with intellectual and developmental disabilities and role of mothers.	Title and abstract	No	Participant group
22.	Turner, G. W., & Crane, B. (2016). Sexually silenced no more, adults with learning disabilities speak up: A call to action for social work to frame sexual voice as a social justice issue.	Title	No	Participant group

23.	Mladenovska, B., & Trajkovski, V. (2010). Opinions and Attitudes of Parents and Students for Sexual Development, Sexual Behavior and Gender Identity of Persons with Autism in the Republic of Macedonia.	Title	No	Focused solely on individuals with ASD
24.	Di Sano, S., Rocha Neves, J., Casale, G., Martinsone, B., & La Salle-Finley, T. P. (2024). Cross-cultural connections: School climate and equity in Germany, Italy, Latvia, and the United States.	Title and abstract	No	Not relevant to review question
25.	Emslander, V., & Scherer, R. (2022). The relation between executive functions and math intelligence in preschool children: A systematic review and meta-analysis.	Title	No	Review paper
26.	Papadatou-Pastou, M., Ntolka, E., Schmitz, J., Martin, M., Munafò, M. R., Ocklenburg, S., & Paracchini, S. (2020). Human handedness: A meta-analysis.	Title	No	Not relevant to review question
27.	Bezrukova, K., Spell, C. S., Perry, J. L., & Jehn, K. A. (2016). A meta-analytical integration of over 40 years of research on diversity training evaluation.	Title	No	Not relevant to review question

28.	Mejias, N. J., Gill, C. J., & Shpigelman, C.-N. (2014). Influence of a support group for young women with disabilities on sense of belonging.	Title	No	Not looking at RSE for CYPwLD
29.	Else-Quest, N. M., Higgins, A., Allison, C., & Morton, L. C. (2012). Gender differences in self-conscious emotional experience: A meta-analysis.	Title	No	Meta analysis Not relevant to review question

Appendix C – PRISMA diagram



Appendix D – Overview studies included within the literature review

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
Nelson et al. (2020)	Experiences of teaching sexual and reproductive health to students with intellectual disabilities	Sweden	Special school educators (n=10, mean age = 39, 6 female and 4 male) across various roles. Supporting CYP with mild to severe intellectual disabilities	Qualitative study Phenomenological approach (Dahlberg et al., 2008) Purposive sampling technique	Individual interviews (took place in 2011) Phenomenological analysis (Dahlberg et al., 2008; Giorgi, 1997)	Themes generated Core essence 'accepting the challenge to coach special-needs students into adulthood': The level of responsibility educators hold in delivering sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) information

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
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as the primary source of such information.

Constitutes

Into adulthood: SRHR as a holistic and encompassing subject, preparing CYPwLD for adult across a range of topics (not just sex).

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						<p><i>Accepting the challenge:</i></p> <p>A need for flexibility/spontaneity.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Systemic restriction to SRHR information: Barriers including unsupportive home environments and limited internet access. 2. Five students, five abilities, five balls in the air: wide class variations in level of

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						ability and sexual experience 3. SRHR as a constant in the classroom: informal presence of related topics within daily teaching 4. Creating a norm for both disability and sex: working to challenge feelings of taboo, embarrassment and shame experienced by

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						<p>staff and students around sexuality and/or disability</p> <p>Coaching: teachers providing motivating, supportive and encouraging guidance.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Creating a climate for sex talk: balancing the need for environment which allows open

Author and	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and	Findings
year of					data analysis	
publication						
						discussion whilst
						teaching privacy.
						2. Who has the right to
						teach sex?:
						Tensions between
						age and experience
						and questions
						around the role of
						educators vs
						professionals.

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
Girgin-Büyükbayraktar et al. (2017)	According to the opinions of teachers of individuals with intellectual disabilities: What are the sexual problems of students with special education needs? How	Turkey	Special school teachers (n = 25, age range = 25-40, 18 female and 7 male)	Qualitative study Purposive sampling	Semi-structured individual interviews Content analysis (Tavşancıl & Aslan, 2001)	<p>Themes generated</p> <p>Sexual problems:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Over(uncontrolled) masturbation 2. Desire to get married 3. Tendency towards sexual touching 4. Physical changes during adolescence <p>Sexual education topics:</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
	should sexual education be provided for them?					<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Satisfying sexual need in an appropriate environment 2. Tendency toward opposite sex 3. Physical changes during adolescence 4. Sanitation of sexual organs

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						<p>How and in what way sexual education would be provided</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Individual differences (of students) <li>2. Cooperation with parents <li>3. Suppressing sexual feelings <li>4. Choosing appropriate environments

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						5. Sanitation rules 6. Receiving information from a same-sex specialist
						<p>Problems which emerge while providing sexual education</p> 1. Development of wrong attitudes 2. Parents' failure to cooperation

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						3. Generalising (i.e. difficulty transferring skills/knowledge to other contexts) 4. Habits (i.e. changing habits) 5. Withdrawal
Wilkenfeld & Ballan (2011)	Educators' attitudes and beliefs towards the sexuality of individuals with	USA	Special educators (n = 10) including five special school teachers (average age = 50:2, 4 female and 1 male) and five	Qualitative study Convenience sample	In-depth individual interviews (structured) Content analysis (Patton, 2008)	Themes generated Sexual expression is a basic human right Participants discussed the importance of supporting

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
	developmental disabilities.		adult day service instructors (average age = 37, 4 female and 1 male).			<p>autonomy and choice in sexual expression, emphasising the importance of normalising societal views of PwLD's sexuality.</p> <p>Capacity to consent</p> <p>Dilemmas around the need to support CYPwLD's right and choice to their own sexuality whilst maintaining</p>

Author and	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and	Findings
year of					data analysis	
publication						
						awareness of their vulnerability.
						Need for sexuality education
						1. the value of providing sexuality education to students
						2. The need for sexuality education to begin during the school years

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						<hr/> <p>3. Techniques for the delivery of a sexuality education curriculum</p> <p>Differences between groups</p> <p>Whilst the instructors spoke positively about their role in relation to sex education, the teachers felt it was beyond their expertise/role and thus</p> <hr/>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						better placed in the hands of other professionals.
Rohleder (2010)	Educators' ambivalence and managing anxiety in providing sex education for people with	South Africa	Staff and teachers associated with an organisation providing support for schools and organisations	Qualitative design Purposive sampling	Individual interviews with the manager of the organisation, the developer/trainer of the sexuality and HIC	Discourses – centred around a general discourse of 'ambivalence' Sex education as problematic / dangerous

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
	learning disabilities.		supporting PwLD (n=7).		education programme, an HIV counsellor and a senior staff member at a residential organisation.	<p>for people with learning disabilities</p> <p>Perceptions of PwLD as either asexual or 'oversexed', with sex education 'encouraging' sexual behaviours.</p> <p>Resistance towards providing sex education</p> <p>Participants perceived a resistance against the provision of sex education.</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
					Semi-structured free association narrative interviews (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).	This came from the schools (including senior leadership and individual staff) and parents. Morality Primarily in relation to Analysis phase 1: educators and organisations with a Discourse analysis (Banister et al., 1994; Marshall, 1994). Christian ethic where sex is typically not spoken about openly.

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
					Analysis phase 2: Psychosocial analysis (Hollway & Jefferson, 2000).	Environment Organisational/school environments inappropriate for sexual expression
Ogur et al. (2023)	An international study: Teachers' opinions about individuals with developmental disabilities	Turkey (international sample)	Teachers who had worked with at least one individual with developmental disabilities (n=32, age range = 22-63, 22 women, 8 men, 2 unspecified) from 11	Qualitative design Multi-stage sample (criterion, convenience and snowball sampling)	Structured interview forms Previous pilot study Content analysis	Themes generated 1. Definition Sex education as a requirement: Sex educational as important

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
	regarding sexuality education.		countries (Turkey = 13, Canada=7, England=3, Kosovo=2, Germany, USA, Spain, Colombia, Macedonia, Serbia, Saudi Arabia=1 from each country)	Case study		<p>for developmental, social and safety reasons.</p> <p>Sex education as an unknown field: Limited evidence base, complexities of differences in abilities</p> <p>2. Content</p> <p>Human development: Topics around scientific</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						<p>components of sexuality.</p> <p>Notable cultural differences.</p> <p>Relationships: Love and emotional relationships.</p> <p>Sexuality and sexual behaviours: Masturbation and sexual behaviours.</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
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Society and culture:

Sexuality, culture and gender roles.

Sexual health: Birth control, pregnancy, prenatal care, sexual abuse, violence and harassment.

3. Methods and techniques

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						<p><i>Teaching methods and techniques:</i> including: behavioural skills and communication, boundaries through rules and behavioural modification, social stories, errorless teaching, among others.</p> <p><i>Teaching arrangements:</i> individual and group</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						arrangements (one respondent).
						Teaching equipment: visuals, videos and books.
						4. Support
						Support from institutions and individuals: support from field experts, professionals and families.

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
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Support from materials:

the internet, books and articles.

Additional findings

Prevalence

56.2% of the participating teachers had worked with IDD, but had not offered any sex education at any stage of their career.

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						Low return rate One participant (Germany) stated that there was a resistance from them and their colleagues to participate in research investigating sex education.

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
Shuib et al. (2022)	The Relationship between Teachers' Knowledge, Practices, Vision, Attitudes and Commitment in Teaching Sexuality Education for Students with	Malaysia	Special education teachers from 96 secondary schools (n = 516, 69 male and 449 female)	Quantitative study Survey design	Questionnaire adapted from previous studies including two parts: 1. Demographics 2. Practice, support, planning and outcome	Experienced teachers in both urban and rural areas were more knowledgeable and optimistic (in terms of vision and attitude) than new teachers in both urban and rural areas with regard to the implementation of sex education for CYPwLD.

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
	Intellectual Disability.				Descriptive statistics (two-way MANOVA)	
Löfgren-Mårtenson & Ouis (2019)	"We Need Bridges": Professionals' Experiences of Sex Education for Pupils with	Sweden	Special school staff including teachers, personal assistants, a school nurse, a special pedagogue, and a school	Qualitative study Purposive sampling	Individual interviews One focus group Unspecified thematic analysis	Themes generated 'It's a long road to go!' Perceptions of the young people's abilities Differences in need, levels of

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
	Intellectual Disabilities in a Multicultural Society		counsellor (n = 9, age range 31-63).		using Gagnon and Simon's (2005) sexual script theory to contextualise findings	communication/language and abstract thinking. This additionally created difficulties when attempting to address cultural differences.
						<p>'We can't change the future!' Experiences of sex education in a multicultural school</p> <p>Recent change in sex education curriculum in</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						<p>Sweden from a specific subject to integration into whole curriculum.</p> <p>Participants felt that it had been 'invisibilised' with no one holding responsibility. Additionally, dilemmas around who should take such responsibilities (i.e. teachers or other professionals) and cultural differences in family views were discussed.</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						<p>'My colleague from Iran is the best help! – Strategies on sex education and honour-related experiences (HRE)</p> <p>Difficulties finding appropriate resources, cultural differences in topic relevance and experiences (e.g. female body considered taboo in some</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
Borawska-Charko et al. (2023)	'More than just the curriculum to deal with': Experiences of teachers delivering sex and	England	Teachers/educations working with people with ID (n = 15, 10 female and 15 male). 10 participants were teachers who	Qualitative design Purposive sampling	Semi-structured individual interviews (conducted in 2015)	cultures, Female Genital Mutilation), importance of colleague collaboration. Themes generated 1. Challenges and difficulties in teaching.

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
	relationship education to people with intellectual disabilities.		worked in special schools and 5 were educators working in voluntary organisations providing support/education/ advocacy services for adults with ID.		Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	Subthemes included: lack of interest, socially inappropriate behaviours (i.e. difficulties supporting students to understand public vs private behaviours, black and white thinking (i.e. teaching around social norms and rules, especially in relation to ASD), experiences of sexual abuse (teachers needing to remain aware of

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
			New Zealand and one from Wales as their education system was seemed similar enough for study inclusion.			individual backgrounds), cognitive abilities, heterogeneous group (i.e. individual differences within teaching groups), Lack of inclusivity (e.g. discussing LGBTQ+ issues), emotions (i.e. difficulties understanding the emotional side of relationships), negative parental attitudes, puberty and anxiety (difficulties

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						<p>understanding and managing change), difficult topics, other challenges and difficulties (including: language differences, gaging understating, perceived as taboo in England)</p> <p>2. How to overcome difficulties</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						General tools and techniques, adapting to individuals, sense of humour and ice-breaking exercises, self-esteem (increasing self-esteem to reduce vulnerability), working with parents, repetition, starting early.
						3. Important topics to cover in RSE

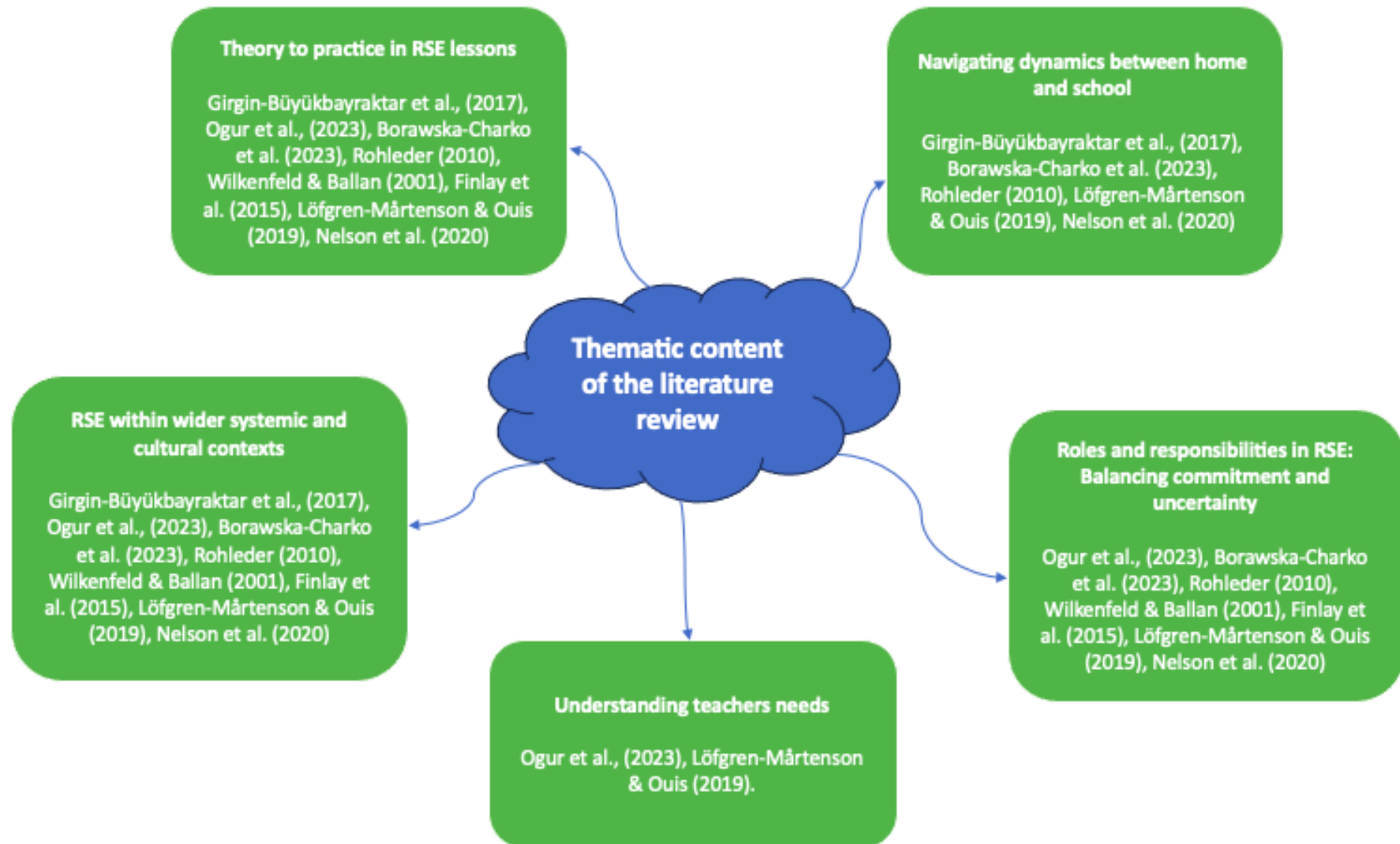
Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						Safeguarding, internet safety, knowing what is right and wrong, making choices, human rights, positive attitudes towards LGBTQ+, developing social life and skills.
Finlay et al. (2015)	'Understanding England' as a practical issue in sexual health education for people with		Young people (n = 4, aged 16-19) Facilitators/teachers (n = 4)	Qualitative design	Video recordings of sexual health education sessions	Interview themes generated Comprehension difficulties

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
	intellectual disabilities: A study using two qualitative methods.				Individual interviews with staff Thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006)	Difficulties gaging level of comprehension, idea that leaners will gave gained some knowledge, even if this doesn't directly reflect session objectives, Tacking comprehension difficulties Use of baseline data, checking understanding within sessions, observing non-verbal responses,

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						<p>careful selection in topics, teaching over time, repetition, role play.</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Video data</p> <p>Comprehension clearly displayed though: performing a requested action, pointing to correct options, correct verbal responses, contribution/elaboration.</p>

Author and year of publication	Title	Location	Sample	Design	Measures and data analysis	Findings
						Comprehension less clearly displayed though: answers to yes/no questions, checking agreement, YP repeating words of teachers or other learners.

Appendix E – Thematic content of the literature review



Appendix F – TREC Ethical Approval

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/>

Martha Harding

By Email

28 June 2023

Dear Martha,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: Teachers experiences of delivering Relationships and Sex Education for children and young people with learning difficulties: An interpretive phenomenological analysis.'

Thank you for submitting your updated Research Ethics documentation. I am pleased to inform you that subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee your application has been approved. This means you can proceed with your research.

Please be advised that any changes to the project design including changes to methodology/data collection etc, must be referred to TREC as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

I am copying this communication to your supervisor.

May I take this opportunity of wishing you every success with your research.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Franklyn



Academic Governance and Quality Officer

T: 020 938 2699

E: academicquality@ta-vi-port.nhs.uk

cc. Course Lead, Supervisor, Research Lead

Appendix G – Minor Amendments Requested for Ethical Approval

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Quality Assurance & Enhancement
Directorate of Education & Training
Tavistock Centre
120 Belsize Lane
London
NW3 5BA

Tel: 020 8938 2699

<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/>

Martha Harding

By Email

11 May 2023

Dear Martha,

Re: Trust Research Ethics Application

Title: 'A Teachers experiences of delivering Relationships and Sex Education for children and young people with learning difficulties: An interpretive phenomenological analysis.'

I am writing to inform you that your application has been reviewed by the Assessors and I can confirm that your research ethics application has not been approved at this stage.

Please note that Minor Amendments have been requested.

Ethical approval is given subject to formal ratification by the Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) and on the proviso of minor amendments requested by TREC assessors are addressed.

The amendments are as follows:

	Criteria	Addressed? (please delete as appropriate)	Comments
1	Do the research aims, methods or methods of analysis give rise to ethical concerns?	(Yes)/No	Additional ethical approval may be required following the internal organizational process of the participating local authority/authorities
2	Are participant selection criteria appropriate and justified?	(Yes)/No	
3	Will written informed consent be obtained? If otherwise, is it justified and ethical?	(Yes)/No Yes/No	
4	If payment will be offered, is this ethical?	Yes/No/(NA)	

5	Are the stated plans to protect confidentiality robust? Do they show due awareness of relevant local and national frameworks?	Yes/(No) (Yes)/No	Zoom is not necessarily considered 'secure' for research data (e.g., if it involves the use of mobile devices). Please consider further any attendant issues with this.
6	If there is any procedure that might cause discomfort/distress, is this reasonable and ethical?	(Yes)/No/NA	Very limited potential for this – appropriate in the context of sensitive research.
7	If there is any distress or risk involved for participants, is this reasonable and ethical?	(Yes)/No/NA	Limited potential the research will cause distress to participants.
8	Will participants be made aware of: their right not to take part or withdraw at any time? their right to confidentiality/privacy? who to contact about participation in the study?	(Yes)/No (Yes)/No (Yes)/No	
9	Is the risk assessment required* – if so, has one been completed satisfactorily? <i>*To be completed if research is not undertaken in regular place of work/study</i>	Yes/(No)	
10	Do you have any advisory comments relating to the proposed project or methodology? (this section is optional)	(Yes)/No	See conditions and comments.

Please ensure that your amendments be made in the form of either a revised application form and/or specific supporting documents e.g., consent letter (where appropriate). Your supervisor/research lead is responsible for guiding you through the ethical approval process; and with this in mind, please ensure that the amended application is signed by yourself, your supervisors and the research lead/course lead **AND** that you copy your supervisor/research/course lead in your response to this letter.

We appreciate that this requires further work on your part, but it would be helpful if you could return your amended application by **25 May 2023** to the Quality Assurance Department (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk). Please include a brief statement in the email explaining how the above amendments/conditions have been met.

In the meantime, you **MAY NOT** begin to undertake your research work at this stage.

If you have any further questions or require any clarification do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely,

Michael Franklyn



Appendix H - Amended Tavistock Research and Ethics Committee (TREC) Application Form

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee (TREC) APPLICATION FOR ETHICAL REVIEW OF STUDENT RESEARCH PROJECTS

This application should be submitted alongside copies of any supporting documentation which will be handed to participants, including a participant information sheet, consent form, self-completion survey or questionnaire.

Where a form is submitted and sections are incomplete, the form will not be considered by TREC and will be returned to the applicant for completion.

For further guidance please contact Paru Jeram (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)

FOR ALL APPLICANTS

If you already have ethical approval from another body (including HRA/IRAS) please submit the application form and outcome letters. You need only complete sections of the TREC form which are NOT covered in your existing approval

Is your project considered as 'research' according to the HRA tool? (http://www.hra-decisiontools.org.uk/research/index.html)	Yes
Will your project involve participants who are under 18 or who are classed as vulnerable? (see section 7)	No
Will your project include data collection outside of the UK?	No

SECTION A: PROJECT DETAILS

Project title	Teachers experiences of delivering Relationships and Sex Education for children and young people with learning difficulties: An interpretive phenomenological analysis.		
Proposed project start date	April 2023	Anticipated project end date	May 2024
Principle Investigator (normally your Research Supervisor): Dale Bartle			
Please note: TREC approval will only be given for the length of the project as stated above up to a maximum of 6 years. Projects exceeding these timeframes will need additional ethical approval			
Has NHS or other approval been sought for this research including through submission via Research Application System (IRAS) or to the Health Research Authority (HRA)?	YES (NRES approval)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	YES (HRA approval)	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	Other	<input type="checkbox"/>	
	NO	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	
If you already have ethical approval from another body (including HRA/IRAS) please submit the application form and outcome letters.			

SECTION B: APPLICANT DETAILS


Name of Researcher	Martha Harding
Programme of Study and Target Award	Child, community and educational psychology (M4) – professional doctorate
Email address	mharding@tavi-port.nhs.uk
Contact telephone number	07454722844

SECTION C: CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

<p>Will any of the researchers or their institutions receive any other benefits or incentives for taking part in this research over and above their normal salary package or the costs of undertaking the research?</p> <p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If YES, please detail below:</p>	
<p>Is there any further possibility for conflict of interest? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>	
<p>Are you proposing to conduct this work in a location where you work or have a placement?</p> <p>YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/></p> <p>If YES, please detail below outline how you will avoid issues arising around colleagues being involved in this project:</p> <p>The sample will be recruited on a voluntary basis, and as such it is possible that teachers within my placement local authority whom I have worked with may volunteer for interview. In which case, such participants would be informed / reminded of the researchers' role within the local authority before being asked to provide consent. Further, participants would be informed that the data collected from the research project will be anonymised and used solely for the research project only. Additionally, they would be informed that anything discussed within interview will not inform the researchers practice or impact on access to services within the local authority and that any arising issues for potential Educational Psychology involvement would need to be raised through normal procedure (i.e. discussion with SENCO and / or link EP). Additionally, the researcher would make use of supervision to support any unexpected issues.</p>	
<p>Is your project being commissioned by and/or carried out on behalf of a body external to the Trust? (for example; commissioned by a local authority, school, care home, other NHS Trust or other organisation).</p> <p><small>*Please note that 'external' is defined as an organisation which is external to the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust (Trust)</small></p> <p>If YES, please add details here:</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
<p>Will you be required to get further ethical approval after receiving TREC approval?</p> <p>If YES, please supply details of the ethical approval bodies below AND include any letters of approval from the ethical approval bodies (letters received after receiving TREC approval should be submitted to complete your record):</p>	<p>YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input checked="" type="checkbox"/></p>
<p> </p>	

If your project is being undertaken with one or more clinical services or organisations external to the Trust, please provide details of these:	
If you still need to agree these arrangements or if you can only approach organisations after you have ethical approval, please identify the types of organisations (eg. schools or clinical services) you wish to approach:	
Do you have approval from the organisations detailed above? (this includes R&D approval where relevant)	YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/> NA <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Please attach approval letters to this application. Any approval letters received after TREC approval has been granted MUST be submitted to be appended to your record	

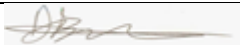
SECTION D: SIGNATURES AND DECLARATIONS

APPLICANT DECLARATION	
I confirm that:	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The information contained in this application is, to the best of my knowledge, correct and up to date. • I have attempted to identify all risks related to the research. • I acknowledge my obligations and commitment to upholding ethical principles and to keep my supervisor updated with the progress of my research • I am aware that for cases of proven misconduct, it may result in formal disciplinary proceedings and/or the cancellation of the proposed research. • I understand that if my project design, methodology or method of data collection changes I must seek an amendment to my ethical approvals as failure to do so, may result in a report of academic and/or research misconduct. 	
Applicant (print name)	Martha Harding
Signed	
Date	27.06.2023

FOR RESEARCH DEGREE STUDENT APPLICANTS ONLY

Name of Supervisor/Principal Investigator	
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Supervisor – <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Does the student have the necessary skills to carry out the research? YES ▪ Is the participant information sheet, consent form and any other documentation appropriate? YES ▪ Are the procedures for recruitment of participants and obtaining informed consent suitable and sufficient? YES ▪ Where required, does the researcher have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance? YES
--

Signed	
Date	27.06.23

COURSE LEAD/RESEARCH LEAD	
Does the proposed research as detailed herein have your support to proceed? YES <input type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	
Signed	
Date	

SECTION E: DETAILS OF THE PROPOSED RESEARCH

<p>1. Provide a brief description of the proposed research, including the requirements of participants. This must be in lay terms and free from technical or discipline specific terminology or jargon. If such terms are required, please ensure they are adequately explained (Do not exceed 500 words)</p>
<p>The proposed research will explore teachers experiences of delivering Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) for children and young people with learning difficulties (CYPwLD) within secondary specialist provisions. In 2001, the White Paper titled 'Valuing People: a new strategy for learning disability for the 21st century' explored issues of terminology, suggesting that many individuals with learning needs prefer the term 'difficulties' to 'disabilities'. Further, the Special Educational Needs and Disability Code of Practice 2015 (DfE, 2015) used the term 'learning difficulty' to refer to children with difficulties in their cognition and learning. As such, the proposed research will use the term learning 'difficulty' (LD) to reflect both legislation and the perspectives of these individuals. The participants will be recruited using volunteer sampling methods via social media platforms and emails to school SENCOs, aiming to gather a range of experiences from teachers across England. The research aims to explore how teachers are experiencing the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD, especially in light of recent legislative changes which made RSE mandatory in all schools from September 2020. In doing so, it is hoped the research an uncover what contributes to experiences of success and challenge in the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD, so we can understand how best to support teachers, and subsequently the CYP they support, to promote inclusive RSE for all. The data will be collected using unstructured interviews and then analysed using an interpretive thematic analysis to provide an in-depth understanding of these lived experiences. It is hoped that 6-10 teachers will be interviewed for approximately 1 hour.</p>
<p>2. Provide a statement on the aims and significance of the proposed research, including potential impact to knowledge and understanding in the field (where appropriate, indicate the associated hypothesis which will be tested). This should be a clear justification of the proposed research, why it should proceed and a statement on any anticipated benefits to the community. (Do not exceed 700 words)</p>
<p>The implementation of RSE became mandatory in all primary and secondary settings in September 2020, with statutory Government guidance (DfE, 2019) providing considerations for children and young people (CYP) with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND). Within the guidance, SEND specific content provided guidance around need for differentiated and personalised teaching to ensure accessibility, awareness of the vulnerability of pupils with SEND, and tailoring content to the specific needs of CYP. However, the guidance is broad in nature, providing limited insight into the structure and content of RSE for CYP with SEND, meaning that the responsibility for the implementation of such programmes has remained upon individual organisations, departments and teachers.</p> <p>For people with Learning Difficulties (PwLD), the issue of appropriate RSE has become a growing concern. Earlier guidance (DfEE, 2000) clearly emphasised the responsibility of all schools to ensure that children and young people (CYP) with special educational needs and disabilities are included within RSE programmes. However, subsequent research indicated gaps in PwLD's understanding of sex and relationships in reported confusion around RSE topics such as masturbation, intercourse and STIs, with no report on participants understanding of the positive, emotional elements of sexual relationships (Simpson, Lafferty and McConkey, 2006). PwLD have</p>

faced undeniable inequality throughout history, with the idea of PwLD having a desire to engage in positive, healthy sexual relationships rarely considered in the early 1900s (Brown, 1994). The impact of such inequalities has had unprecedented effects on PwLD's health and overall wellbeing. Literature has indicated that PwLD experience a higher proportion of issues related to sex and relationships. For example, PwLD are more likely to report experiences of sexual abuse than those without a LD (Peckham, 2007; McDaniels and Fleming, 2016). PwLD have a right to happy and healthy sexual relationships, with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (2006) reflecting this, asserting that people with disabilities have a right to good sexual healthcare and must not be discriminated against in areas including marriage and relationships. To address this, PwLD need effective, appropriate and meaningful RSE whilst in school to ensure they are not left behind their peers and have the knowledge and skills to develop happy and healthy sexual relationships.

Research investigating the delivery of RSE for CYPwLD has remained limited, however studies have indicated some of the challenges staff members face in delivering RSE. For example, Rohleder (2010) explored the experience and perceptions of educators responsible for providing RSE in South Africa, finding that staff felt ambivalent about their role and identified barriers around organisational clarity in the agreement to the content of RSE and further unclarity as to whether the organisation had the capacity to create a positive, safe environment in which PwLDs right to relationships and sex could be supported. Lafferty, McConkey and Simpson (2012) further investigated barriers to the delivery of appropriate and effective RSE for PwLD with professionals, finding inconsistent provision across schools, a lack of effective training, and feelings of organisational pressure to limit the sexual expression of the individuals whom they were supporting. Thompson, Stancliffe, Broom and Wilson (2014) investigated professional staff's perspectives on the barriers to sexual health provision with educators and clinicians in Australia, identifying three core barriers, including: administrative barriers, such as lacking policy or resources; experience of PwLD, such as no prior access to RSE or low priority; and attitudes, including those of the community, family and staff. However, due to the differing support systems across countries it is unclear whether many of these findings are generalisable to PwLD within the UK. Although, previous research within the UK has indicated issues around PwLD's understanding of sexually related topics (e.g. Simpson, Lafferty and McConkey, 2006), such research is somewhat outdated indicating a need for further research within the UK.

Given the recent legislative changes, it is essential that teachers experiences in delivering RSE for CYPwLD within specialist settings have been explored, enabling the development of structures to effectively school staff, and thus enabling them to effectively deliver appropriate RSE for CYPwLD.

3. Provide an outline of the methodology for the proposed research, including proposed method of data collection, tasks assigned to participants of the research and the proposed method and duration of data analysis. If the proposed research makes use of pre-established and generally accepted techniques, please make this clear. (Do not exceed 500 words)

The proposed qualitative research is underpinned by relativist ontology and constructivist epistemology which falls in line with the framework underlying IPA (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2022), aiming to answer the following provisional research question:

What is it like for school staff to deliver RSE for CYPwLD within secondary specialist provisions?

Data will be collected using unstructured individual interviews in line with Smith, Flowers and Larkin's (2022) guidance for unstructured interviewing. Unstructured interviews are a style of interviewing where the interviewer has freedom to select interview questions throughout the process according to the interview content as it emerges. Thus, this allows for a highly participant led process, with limited influence of the researchers presupposed perspective on the interview process and structure of responses. The interviews will follow a single core interview question, resembling the research question: that is, "Please tell me about your experience of delivering RSE for CYPwLD" with the remainder of the interview dependent of participant responses (Smith, Flowers and Larkin, 2022). To ensure consent throughout the interview process, should participants become distressed at any stage they will be asked whether they wish to continue. Due to the aims of proposed sample being representative of specialist teachers delivering RSE across England,

interviews will take place via video call platforms e.g. Zoom. The interviews will be recorded and transcribed prior to data analysis, with consent for this sought from all participants beforehand.

The qualitative data will be analysed using an interpretive phenomenological analysis (IPA), providing a detailed exploration of the teachers' personal perspectives with attempts to make sense of their world (Smith, 1996).

SECTION F: PARTICIPANT DETAILS

4. Provide an explanation detailing how you will identify, approach and recruit the participants for the proposed research, including clarification on sample size and location. Please provide justification for the exclusion/inclusion criteria for this study (i.e. who will be allowed to / not allowed to participate) and explain briefly, in lay terms, why these criteria are in place. (Do not exceed 500 words)

A purposive sampling method will be utilised for the research, utilising volunteer and opportunity methods. The sample population for both elements of the study will consist of teachers who have delivered RSE since September 2020 within secondary specialist provisions for CYPwLD. Participants will be assessed against the following inclusion and exclusion criteria:

Inclusion criteria:

- Teachers who have delivered RSE for CYPwLD within secondary specialist provisions.
- Teachers who have delivered RSE for CYPwLD since September 2020.

Exclusion criteria:

- Teachers working within mainstream, primary or nursery settings
- Teachers working in secondary specialise provisions who have delivered RSE for CYPwLD prior to September 2020.
- Teachers who have not held a role in delivering RSE for CYPwLD.

The participants will be recruited through advertisement using means such as social media websites, emails to school SENCOs and flyers within schools. With regard to sample size, it is hoped that 6-10 participants from a range of different settings will be recruited. Participants will be asked to provide non-identifiable individual data to assess responses against the inclusion/exclusion criteria and to collect demographic information including position within school and geographical location, providing additional depth to the data collected. The participants will be provided with an information sheet (see attached) to review at their own pace (i.e. providing a participant led cooling off period) before signing an electronic consent form, and subsequently arranging interview dates. Within the advertisement it will be noted that due to the scope of the study participants will be selected on a first come, first served basis meaning that expression of interest will not necessarily lead to recruitment.

5. Please state the location(s) of the proposed research including the location of any interviews. Please provide a Risk Assessment if required. Consideration should be given to lone working, visiting private residences, conducting research outside working hours or any other non-standard arrangements.

If any data collection is to be done online, please identify the platforms to be used.

All data will be collected online. Interviews will take place via Zoom to allow for a breadth of participants in terms of geographical location. Participants will be asked to attend the interview in a private and secure environment to ensure confidentiality.

6. Will the participants be from any of the following groups?(Tick as appropriate)

- Students or Staff of the Trust or Partner delivering your programme.
- Adults (over the age of 18 years with mental capacity to give consent to participate in the research).
- Children or legal minors (anyone under the age of 16 years)¹
- Adults who are unconscious, severely ill or have a terminal illness.
- Adults who may lose mental capacity to consent during the course of the research.
- Adults in emergency situations.
- Adults² with mental illness - particularly those detained under the Mental Health Act (1983 & 2007).
- Participants who may lack capacity to consent to participate in the research under the research requirements of the Mental Capacity Act (2005).
- Prisoners, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).

- Young Offenders, where ethical approval may be required from the National Offender Management Service (NOMS).
- Healthy volunteers (in high risk intervention studies).
- Participants who may be considered to have a pre-existing and potentially dependent³ relationship with the investigator (e.g. those in care homes, students, colleagues, service-users, patients).
- Other vulnerable groups (see Question 6).
- Adults who are in custody, custodial care, or for whom a court has assumed responsibility.
- Participants who are members of the Armed Forces.

¹If the proposed research involves children or adults who meet the Police Act (1997) definition of vulnerability³, any researchers who will have contact with participants must have current Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) clearance.

² 'Adults with a learning or physical disability, a physical or mental illness, or a reduction in physical or mental capacity, and living in a care home or home for people with learning difficulties or receiving care in their own home, or receiving hospital or social care services.' (Police Act, 1997)

³ Proposed research involving participants with whom the investigator or researcher(s) shares a dependent or unequal relationships (e.g. teacher/student, clinical therapist/service-user) may compromise the ability to give informed consent which is free from any form of pressure (real or implied) arising from this relationship. TREC recommends that, wherever practicable, investigators choose participants with whom they have no dependent relationship. Following due scrutiny, if the investigator is confident that the research involving participants in dependent relationships is vital and defensible, TREC will require additional information setting out the case and detailing how risks inherent in the dependent relationship will be managed. TREC will also need to be reassured that refusal to participate will not result in any discrimination or penalty.

7. Will the study involve participants who are vulnerable? YES NO

For the purposes of research, 'vulnerable' participants may be adults whose ability to protect their own interests are impaired or reduced in comparison to that of the broader population. Vulnerability may arise from:

- the participant's personal characteristics (e.g. mental or physical impairment)
- their social environment, context and/or disadvantage (e.g. socio-economic mobility, educational attainment, resources, substance dependence, displacement or homelessness).
- where prospective participants are at high risk of consenting under duress, or as a result of manipulation or coercion, they must also be considered as vulnerable
- children are automatically presumed to be vulnerable.

7.1. If YES, what special arrangements are in place to protect vulnerable participants' interests?

If YES, a Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) check within the last three years is required.

Please provide details of the "clear disclosure":

Date of disclosure:
Type of disclosure:
Organisation that requested disclosure:
DBS certificate number:

(NOTE: information concerning activities which require DBS checks can be found via <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/dbs-check-eligible-positions-guidance>). Please **do not** include a copy of your DBS certificate with your application

8. Do you propose to make any form of payment or incentive available to participants of the research?
 YES NO

If **YES**, please provide details taking into account that any payment or incentive should be representative of reasonable remuneration for participation and may not be of a value that could be coercive or exerting undue influence on potential participants' decision to take part in the research. Wherever possible, remuneration in a monetary form should be avoided and substituted with vouchers, coupons or equivalent. Any payment made to research participants may have benefit or HMRC implications and participants should be alerted to this in the participant information sheet as they may wish to choose to decline payment.

9. What special arrangements are in place for eliciting informed consent from participants who may not adequately understand verbal explanations or written information provided in English; where participants have special communication needs; where participants have limited literacy; or where children are involved in the research? (Do not exceed 200 words)

N/A

SECTION F: RISK ASSESSMENT AND RISK MANAGEMENT

10. Does the proposed research involve any of the following? (Tick as appropriate)

- use of a questionnaire, self-completion survey or data-collection instrument (attach copy)
- use of emails or the internet as a means of data collection
- use of written or computerised tests
- interviews (attach interview questions)
- diaries (attach diary record form)
- participant observation
- participant observation (in a non-public place) without their knowledge / covert research
- audio-recording interviewees or events
- video-recording interviewees or events
- access to personal and/or sensitive data (i.e. student, patient, client or service-user data) without the participant's informed consent for use of these data for research purposes
- administration of any questions, tasks, investigations, procedures or stimuli which may be experienced by participants as physically or mentally painful, stressful or unpleasant during or after the research process
- performance of any acts which might diminish the self-esteem of participants or cause them to experience discomfiture, regret or any other adverse emotional or psychological reaction
- Themes around extremism or radicalisation
- investigation of participants involved in illegal or illicit activities (e.g. use of illegal drugs)
- procedures that involve the deception of participants
- administration of any substance or agent
- use of non-treatment of placebo control conditions
- participation in a clinical trial
- research undertaken at an off-campus location (risk assessment attached)
- research overseas (please ensure Section G is complete)

11. Does the proposed research involve any specific or anticipated risks (e.g. physical, psychological, social, legal or economic) to participants that are greater than those encountered in everyday life?

YES NO

If **YES**, please describe below including details of precautionary measures.

<p>12. Where the procedures involve potential hazards and/or discomfort or distress for participants, please state what previous experience the investigator or researcher(s) have had in conducting this type of research.</p>
<p>Given that RSE is potentially a sensitive topic, there is possibility for discomfort or distress during the interview process. Whilst the researcher has not experienced this during research, the researchers role as a Trainee Educational Psychologist involves a significant responsibility in supporting individuals in their experiences of distress throughout several elements of the role, such as within client interview/consultation. As such, the researcher will utilise approaches fundamental to their practice, alongside supervision, to ensure that experiences of discomfort or distress are appropriately explored and contained.</p>
<p>13. Provide an explanation of any potential benefits to participants. Please ensure this is framed within the overall contribution of the proposed research to knowledge or practice. (Do not exceed 400 words) NOTE: Where the proposed research involves students, they should be assured that accepting the offer to participate or choosing to decline will have no impact on their assessments or learning experience. Similarly, it should be made clear to participants who are patients, service-users and/or receiving any form of treatment or medication that they are not invited to participate in the belief that participation in the research will result in some relief or improvement in their condition.</p>
<p>Within the current climate, many educational settings are facing increased pressure in supporting their students, with the number of initial requests for Education, Health and Care Plans increasing by 23% last year providing some insight into the rising pressure schools are facing (DfE, 2021). Further, whilst we are still developing our understanding on the lasting impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on school staff, the immediate impact has been undeniable with 52% of teachers have reported a decline in mental health since the initial stages of the pandemic and 51% reporting consideration of leaving the profession in relation to this (Education Support, 2020). As such, it is possible that providing participants with a space in which they can voice their experiences, thoughts and concerns may be beneficial in providing a space for reflection and participating a study with hopes to facilitate positive change in the research area.</p>
<p>14. Provide an outline of any measures you have in place in the event of adverse or unexpected outcomes and the potential impact this may have on participants involved in the proposed research. (Do not exceed 300 words)</p>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - An additional 30 minutes will be allocated at the end of each interview to debrief participants and allow for discussion and containment of any distress evoked within the interview process. - All participants will be provided with the researchers contact details should they have any questions or concerns they would like to discuss following data collection. - All participants will be signposted to services they can access for support should the data collection process elicit any concerns e.g. accessing individual support / support for any concerns raised around practice within their setting. - Participants will be required to identify the Local Authority within which they work within the consent form to allow for safeguarding procedures should any professional misconduct or otherwise unlawful/abusive practice be disclosed, prior to anonymisation of the data.
<p>15. Provide an outline of your debriefing, support and feedback protocol for participants involved in the proposed research. This should include, for example, where participants may feel the need to discuss thoughts or feelings brought about following their participation in the research. This may involve referral to an external support or counseling service, where participation in the research has caused specific issues for participants.</p>

An additional 30 minutes will be allocated at the end of each interview to debrief participants and allow for discussion and containment of any distress evoked within the interview process. Participants will be provided with details for external support organisations should they need further support with any arising issues, thoughts or feelings from the proposed research (see below).

16. Please provide the names and nature of any external support or counselling organisations that will be suggested to participants if participation in the research has potential to raise specific issues for participants.

If the participants indicate a need for further support, they will be provided with contact details for Education Support (<https://www.educationsupport.org.uk/>).

17. Where medical aftercare may be necessary, this should include details of the treatment available to participants. Debriefing may involve the disclosure of further information on the aims of the research, the participant's performance and/or the results of the research. (Do not exceed 500 words)

N/A

FOR RESEARCH UNDERTAKEN OUTSIDE THE UK

18. Does the proposed research involve travel outside of the UK?
YES NO

If YES, please confirm:

I have consulted the Foreign and Commonwealth Office website for guidance/travel advice? <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/travel-and-living-abroad/>

I have completed a RISK Assessment covering all aspects of the project including consideration of the location of the data collection and risks to participants.

All overseas project data collection will need approval from the Deputy Director of Education and Training or their nominee. Normally this will be done based on the information provided in this form. All projects approved through the TREC process will be indemnified by the Trust against claims made by third parties.

If you have any queries regarding research outside the UK, please contact academicquality@taviport.nhs.uk:

Students are required to arrange their own travel and medical insurance to cover project work outside of the UK. Please indicate what insurance cover you have or will have in place.

19. Please evidence how compliance with all local research ethics and research governance requirements have been assessed for the country(ies) in which the research is taking place. Please also clarify how the requirements will be met:

SECTION G: PARTICIPANT CONSENT AND WITHDRAWAL

20. Have you attached a copy of your participant information sheet (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.

YES NO

If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

21. Have you attached a copy of your participant consent form (this should be in *plain English*)? Where the research involves non-English speaking participants, please include translated materials.

YES NO

If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

22. The following is a participant information sheet checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.

- Clear identification of the Trust as the sponsor for the research, the project title, the Researcher and Principal Investigator (your Research Supervisor) and other researchers along with relevant contact details.
- Details of what involvement in the proposed research will require (e.g., participation in interviews, completion of questionnaire, audio/video-recording of events), estimated time commitment and any risks involved.
- A statement confirming that the research has received formal approval from TREC or other ethics body.
- If the sample size is small, advice to participants that this may have implications for confidentiality / anonymity.
- A clear statement that where participants are in a dependent relationship with any of the researchers that participation in the research will have no impact on assessment / treatment / service-use or support.
- Assurance that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw consent at any time, and to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
- Advice as to arrangements to be made to protect confidentiality of data, including that confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.
- A statement that the data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the [Trusts 's Data Protection and handling Policies.](https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/):
<https://tavistockandportman.nhs.uk/about-us/governance/policies-and-procedures/>
- Advice that if participants have any concerns about the conduct of the investigator, researcher(s) or any other aspect of this research project, they should contact Simon Carrington, Head of Academic Governance and Quality Assurance (academicquality@tavi-port.nhs.uk)
- Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

23. The following is a consent form checklist covering the various points that should be included in this document.

- Trust letterhead or logo.
- Title of the project (with research degree projects this need not necessarily be the title of the thesis) and names of investigators.
- Confirmation that the research project is part of a degree
- Confirmation that involvement in the project is voluntary and that participants are free to withdraw at any time, or to withdraw any unprocessed data previously supplied.
- Confirmation of particular requirements of participants, including for example whether interviews are to be audio-/video-recorded, whether anonymised quotes will be used in publications advice of legal limitations to data confidentiality.
- If the sample size is small, confirmation that this may have implications for anonymity any other relevant information.
- The proposed method of publication or dissemination of the research findings.
- Details of any external contractors or partner institutions involved in the research.
- Details of any funding bodies or research councils supporting the research.
- Confirmation on any limitations in confidentiality where disclosure of imminent harm to self and/or others may occur.

SECTION H: CONFIDENTIALITY AND ANONYMITY

24. Below is a checklist covering key points relating to the confidentiality and anonymity of participants. Please indicate where relevant to the proposed research.

- Participants will be completely anonymised and their identity will not be known by the investigator or researcher(s) (i.e. the participants are part of an anonymous randomised sample and return responses with no form of personal identification)?
- The responses are anonymised or are an anonymised sample (i.e. a permanent process of coding has been carried out whereby direct and indirect identifiers have been removed from data and replaced by a code, with no record retained of how the code relates to the identifiers).
- The samples and data are de-identified (i.e. direct and indirect identifiers have been removed and replaced by a code. The investigator or researchers are able to link the code to the original identifiers and isolate the participant to whom the sample or data relates).
- Participants have the option of being identified in a publication that will arise from the research.
- Participants will be pseudo-anonymised in a publication that will arise from the research. (I.e. the researcher will endeavour to remove or alter details that would identify the participant.)
- The proposed research will make use of personal sensitive data.
- Participants consent to be identified in the study and subsequent dissemination of research findings and/or publication.

25. Participants must be made aware that the confidentiality of the information they provide is subject to legal limitations in data confidentiality (i.e. the data may be subject to a subpoena, a freedom of information request or mandated reporting by some professions). This only applies to named or de-identified data. If your participants are named or de-identified, please confirm that you will specifically state these limitations.

YES NO

If **NO**, please indicate why this is the case below:

NOTE: WHERE THE PROPOSED RESEARCH INVOLVES A SMALL SAMPLE OR FOCUS GROUP, PARTICIPANTS SHOULD BE ADVISED THAT THERE WILL BE DISTINCT LIMITATIONS IN THE LEVEL OF ANONYMITY THEY CAN BE AFFORDED.

SECTION I: DATA ACCESS, SECURITY AND MANAGEMENT

26. Will the Researcher/Principal Investigator be responsible for the security of all data collected in connection with the proposed research? YES NO

If **NO**, please indicate what alternative arrangements are in place below:

27. In line with the 5th principle of the Data Protection Act (1998), which states that personal data shall not be kept for longer than is necessary for that purpose or those purposes for which it was collected; please state how long data will be retained for.

1-2 years 3-5 years 6-10 years 10> years

NOTE: In line with Research Councils UK (RCUK) guidance, doctoral project data should normally be stored for 10 years and Masters level data for up to 2 years

28. Below is a checklist which relates to the management, storage and secure destruction of data for the purposes of the proposed research. Please indicate where relevant to your proposed arrangements.

- Research data, codes and all identifying information to be kept in separate locked filing cabinets.
- Research data will only be stored in the University of Essex OneDrive system and no other cloud storage location.
- Access to computer files to be available to research team by password only.
- Access to computer files to be available to individuals outside the research team by password only (See 23.1).
- Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically within the UK.
- Research data will be encrypted and transferred electronically outside of the UK.

NOTE: Transfer of research data via third party commercial file sharing services, such as Google Docs and YouSendIt are not necessarily secure or permanent. These systems may also be located overseas and not covered by UK law. If the system is located outside the European Economic Area (EEA) or territories deemed to have sufficient standards of data protection, transfer may also breach the Data Protection Act (1998).

Essex students also have access the 'Box' service for file transfer:

<https://www.essex.ac.uk/student/it-services/box>

- Use of personal addresses, postcodes, faxes, e-mails or telephone numbers.
- Collection and storage of personal sensitive data (e.g. racial or ethnic origin, political or religious beliefs or physical or mental health or condition).
- Use of personal data in the form of audio or video recordings.
- Primary data gathered on encrypted mobile devices (i.e. laptops).

NOTE: This should be transferred to secure University of Essex OneDrive at the first opportunity.

- All electronic data will undergo secure disposal.

NOTE: For hard drives and magnetic storage devices (HDD or SSD), deleting files does not permanently erase the data on most systems, but only deletes the reference to the file. Files can be restored when deleted in this way. Research files must be overwritten to ensure they are completely irretrievable. Software is available for the secure erasing of files from hard drives which

meet recognised standards to securely scramble sensitive data. Examples of this software are BC Wipe, Wipe File, DeleteOnClick and Eraser for Windows platforms. Mac users can use the standard 'secure empty trash' option; an alternative is Permanent eraser software.

All hardcopy data will undergo secure disposal.

NOTE: For shredding research data stored in hardcopy (i.e. paper), adopting DIN 3 ensures files are cut into 2mm strips or confetti like cross-cut particles of 4x40mm. The UK government requires a minimum standard of DIN 4 for its material, which ensures cross cut particles of at least 2x15mm.

29. Please provide details of individuals outside the research team who will be given password protected access to encrypted data for the proposed research.

N/A

30. Please provide details on the regions and territories where research data will be electronically transferred that are external to the UK:

N/A

SECTION J: PUBLICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF RESEARCH FINDINGS

30. How will the results of the research be reported and disseminated? (Select all that apply)

- Peer reviewed journal
- Non-peer reviewed journal
- Peer reviewed books
- Publication in media, social media or website (including Podcasts and online videos)
- Conference presentation
- Internal report
- Promotional report and materials
- Reports compiled for or on behalf of external organisations
- Dissertation/Thesis

- | |
|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Other publication
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Written feedback to research participants
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Presentation to participants or relevant community groups
<input type="checkbox"/> Other (Please specify below) |
|---|

SECTION K: OTHER ETHICAL ISSUES

31. Are there any other ethical issues that have not been addressed which you would wish to bring to the attention of Tavistock Research Ethics Committee (TREC)?
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N/A

SECTION L: CHECKLIST FOR ATTACHED DOCUMENTS

32. Please check that the following documents are attached to your application.
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- | |
|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Letters of approval from any external ethical approval bodies (where relevant)
<input type="checkbox"/> Recruitment advertisement
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Participant information sheets (including easy-read where relevant)
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Consent forms (including easy-read where relevant)
<input type="checkbox"/> Assent form for children (where relevant)
<input type="checkbox"/> Letters of approval from locations for data collection
<input type="checkbox"/> Questionnaire
<input type="checkbox"/> Interview Schedule or topic guide
<input type="checkbox"/> Risk Assessment (where applicable)
<input type="checkbox"/> Overseas travel approval (where applicable) |
|--|

34. Where it is not possible to attach the above materials, please provide an explanation below.

The interviews will utilise an unstructured format, allowing for a participant led process, and as such an interview schedule is not applicable.
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Appendix I – Participant Information Sheet

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Tavistock and Portman Trust Research Ethics Committee

This project has been ethically approved by the Tavistock and Portman NHS Foundation Trust ethics review board.

If you have any queries regarding the conduct of the study in which you are being asked to participate, please contact:

Paru Jeram, Trust Quality Assurance Officer pjeram@tavi-port.nhs.uk

The Researcher

Martha Harding

mharding@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Research Supervisor

Dale Bartle

dbartle@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Consent to Participate in a Research Study

The purpose of this letter is to provide you with the information that you need to consider in deciding whether to participate in this study.

Project Title

Teachers experiences of delivering Relationships and Sex Education for children and young people with learning difficulties: An interpretive phenomenological analysis.

Project Description

Following the mandatory implementation of Relationships and Sex Education (RSE) across all schools in September 2020, this research project aims to explore how teachers within secondary specialist provisions are experiencing their role in delivering RSE for children and young people with learning difficulties (CYPwLD). In doing so, it is hoped the research can uncover what contributes to experiences of success and challenge, so we can understand how best to support teachers, and subsequently the children and young people they support, to promote inclusive RSE for all.

You have been invited to take part in this project because you have expressed an interest in the study and have identified as a teacher within a secondary specialist provision who has delivered RSE for children and young people with learning disabilities since September 2020.

Participation in the study is completely voluntary, and the following information is provided to help inform your decision. If you choose to participate in this project, you will be invited to a single online interview (via Zoom) with the researcher, Martha Harding (Trainee Educational Psychologist). In the interview you will be asked about your experiences of delivering RSE for CYPwLD and hopes for the future. If there

are any questions you do not wish to answer you do not have to, and you can request to terminate the interview at any time. The interview is expected to last for approximately 1 hour.

Before the interview, the researcher will explain the study to you and answer any questions you may have. Once the interview has commenced, you will be debriefed and have an opportunity to discuss any arising issues or feelings should you wish, especially given the sensitive nature of RSE. As such, it would be advisable to allow approximately 1.5 hours for participation.

The results of the study will be presented in the researchers' thesis as part of the requirements for their Professional Doctorate in Child, Community and Educational Psychology, which will be completed in July 2024. They may also be published in peer-reviewed scientific journals and presented during conferences or to relevant organisations. Additionally, the results may be used at a national level to support the development of RSE for CYPwLD.

Confidentiality of the Data

All information will be anonymised using pseudonyms to protect your identity. It should be noted, however, that due to the small sample size of the study there are limitations on the level of anonymity that can be afforded.

The interviews will be audio recorded to support the data analysis process. These recordings will not be used for any other purpose. Your interview responses will be transcribed and anonymised to protect your identity. No identifiable information will be used in reports or publications, only the anonymised information will be shared with others.

You will be provided with your pseudonym prior to participation should you wish to withdraw your data from the study. You will be able to withdraw your data from the study for 2 weeks after your interview, as this is when your data will be analysed.

All data generated in the course of the research will be retained in accordance with the Tavistock and Portman Trust's data protection and handling policy. Your consent form, interview audio recording and any other identifiable information will be stored securely and separately from your interview transcript in password protected files on the researcher's computer. These will be destroyed after 10 years once the research has commenced, as per the Research Councils UK guidance.

The only time your information would need to be shared, is if you were to provide information that suggests a serious risk of harm to you or someone else in line with established local safeguarding procedures.

Location

The interview will take place online (via Zoom). You will be asked to attend the interview in a private, confidential space at a previously agreed time that is convenient to you.

Disclaimer

You are not obliged to take part in this study and are free to withdraw at any time during the data collection stage of the study. Should you choose to withdraw from the study you may do so without disadvantage to yourself and without any obligation to give a reason.

Appendix J – Participant Consent Form

The Tavistock and Portman 
NHS Foundation Trust

Consent to Participate in a Doctoral Research Study Involving the Use of Human Participants

Teachers experiences of delivering Relationships and Sex Education for children and young people with learning difficulties: An interpretive phenomenological analysis.

I have read the information leaflet relating to the above programme of research in which I have been asked to participate and have been given a copy to keep. The nature and purposes of the research have been explained to me, and I have had the opportunity to discuss the details and ask questions about this information. I understand what is being proposed and the procedures in which I will be involved have been explained to me.

I understand that findings will be used as part of the researchers doctoral thesis. They may also be used in publications, conferences or presented to relevant organisations.

I understand that my involvement in this study, and data from this research, will remain confidential. I understand that the small sample size of the study may have implications for confidentiality, but my interview data will be anonymised using a pseudonym to protect my data as much as possible. Only the researchers involved in the study will have access to the data. It has been explained to me what will happen once the study has been completed. I understand that my interview will be audio-recorded and that anonymised quotes may be used in the thesis and publications

I understand that although the interviews are confidential, should my participation result in a disclosure of imminent harm to myself and/or others, local safeguarding procedures will need to be followed.

I hereby freely and fully consent to participate in the study which has been fully explained to me. Having given this consent I understand that I have the right to withdraw from the study at any time up until the data is analysed without disadvantage to myself and without being obliged to give any reason.

Participant's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Participant's Employing Local Authority

.....

Participant's Signature

.....

Investigator's Name (BLOCK CAPITALS)

.....

Investigator's Signature

.....

Date:

Appendix K – Research Flyer



Do you teach Relationships and Sex Education for children with learning difficulties?

Are you eligible?

This study is looking to hear from teachers who have delivered Relationships and Sex Education for children and young people with learning difficulties within secondary specialist provisions since September 2020.

What does this involve?

An individual interview via zoom at a time best suited to your needs. The interview will last for approximately 1 hour and you will be asked about your experience and hopes for the future.

The research study aims to uncover factors which may contribute to experiences of success or challenge in the delivery of Relationships and Sex Education for children and young people with learning needs, so we can understand how best to support teachers, and the individuals you support, to promote inclusive RSE for all.

If you would be interested in participating or would like further information please contact Martha Harding – mharding@tavi-port.nhs.uk

Appendix L – Interview Transcripts and Analysis

Rosie’s interview

Experiential statements	Transcript	Exploratory notes (Descriptive, <i>linguistic</i> , conceptual)
<p>Working in schools for SLD requires a highly flexible, individualised approach. R1</p> <p>Struggle to align curriculum objectives with student needs, as the guidance is irrelevant to students lived experience. R1</p> <p>Holding a dual responsibility. R1</p>	<p>Martha: Alright, so I'm just going to start with my opening question, which is please tell me about your experience of delivering RSE for children and young people with learning difficulties?</p> <p>Rosie: Okay, so my school is children with severe learning difficulties, so we've got a bit quite a range of different needs and sort of a really quite large range of like cognitive ability. So, we've got some children who've got PMLD, and then like a third of our kids have got a diagnosis of autism, and then some other developmental conditions as well. So, as well there's like a, it's a very, very much individualised curriculum. So for <u>every</u> lesson, no matter what the subject, it's very much like based on the kids targets. And so when it comes to RSE, it's kind of like a similar thing really. So yeah, last year when I had my well slightly older class, KS3 class, yeah you had to really think about what they needed rather than exactly what was on the statutory guidance because so much of it is completely irrelevant to them. And yeah, that's where it's tricky really, because there's sort of, you know, the guidance and some you know, objectives, for what they should be looking at, and you try and you know follow those as much as possible, but for the vast majority of time it's just not suitable for them. So it's very much like trying to work out what they actually need in terms of sex education and, I</p>	<p>Severity of the learning needs to correlate with the diversity of needs students may have – need for highly flexible approach.</p> <p>Similar flexible approach across all subjects, not just RSE.</p> <p>Statutory guidance not suitable for CYPwLD.</p> <p><i>Tricky - <u>Tension between wanting to follow guidelines and providing better fitting support?</u> 'should'.</i></p> <p>Finding what’s helpful or relevant for CYP.</p>

<p>Tension arising from the uncertainty around what content is most appropriate for individual students. R2</p> <p>Stark transition from mechanical and rigid nature of mainstream curriculum delivery, devoid of flexibility. R2</p> <p>Greater responsibility on schools and teachers to determine appropriate content / delivery strategies. R2</p>	<p>should say as well, like I am PSHE lead so I did a lot of work with the upper school team so they have the kids up from like 16 to 19ish, so we talk through a lot of their RSE lessons as well, so I know what they were up to too. Yeah, it's basically just very, very individualised and it can be quite tricky to know (<i>pause</i>) what they should be (<i>pause</i>) looking at, because my background before was mainstream, so it was a mainstream primary for six years, and that's very like, you know, here's the list of words. Even I think the Council I was in literally was like here's the language that they need to know. They need to know... in year three they need to know penis (<i>laughs</i>), like but it's very just like duh-duh-duh-duh-duh and very like, this is the lesson you have to teach in this six week block in the summer, almost quite different to actually the rest of the curriculum. It's like a whole separate thing of like they must cover these exact words sort of thing, whereas with, uh you know, SEN, they, you know, the guidance says 'teach what you need to' (<i>laughs</i>) so it's very much like on the school and the teachers to make those decisions, which is quite tricky.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, so it sounds like sort of the guidance is quite broad, maybe?</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, yeah.</p> <p>Martha: and so you're taking a very individualised kind of approach to each time—</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah. Yeah. And it's probably, in some ways it's maybe for the best that it's broad, in some ways, because you know for some of our kids, you know, particularly the</p>	<p>Dual role – responsible for also supporting other staff</p> <p><i>'tricky' and 'should' mentioned again. Pauses seem to further reflection tension.</i></p> <p>Differences in experiences of mainstream and SEN approaches. <i>Humour in reference to sex topics. Duh-duh-duh</i></p> <p>Comparison between expectations in SEN vs mainstream.</p> <p>Responsibility shift onto teachers. <i>'Tricky' again.</i></p> <p>Guidance is helpful in some ways and not in others - <u>Feelings of ambivalence</u></p>
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<p>Following the guidance verbatim would result in forcing a fake lesson for ofsted. R2-3</p> <p>Navigating differences in 'cognitive' and 'physical' age. R3</p> <p>Anticipating the potential trajectory of a student's life path. R3</p> <p>Teachers need to make definitive decisions as to what each student needs to know based on an ambiguous perception of what their adult life will be like. R3</p>	<p>ones who have PMLD, for example, they have got very little awareness of what's going? You know, we're working on them responding to light, you know, them responding to touch, that sort of thing. So saying, you know, they need to understand consent is going to be like... that's like, you know, <u>so</u> beyond what they're working on, it would just be like be, shoe on trying to like, do some sort of fake lesson for ofsted If that was like, you know, the guidance. So, you know, having that flexibility is is useful in some ways and, you know, with my class last year, who were I did have some kids who were verbal, who had, you know, were working sort of broadly at, you know, Key Stage 1 sort of level with some of their work. But, had the hormones of a 15 year old and there was a lot more content that we needed that needed to be covered, but it's so, so different to what you would do in a mainstream class like it's yeah, very much like thinking, right, this child is, you know, this is how their life is potentially going to play out. Like, are they going to have, are they going to be in a situation where they might have sex? Like for some of them? No. Like they are going to be probably in some sort of.. either living at home or they're gonna be in a supported facility for their whole lives. They're gonna be, you know, they've got very little awareness in terms of building relationships with people and lessons I've made, like a safeguarding situation, like that's not going to happen for them. And they don't necessarily need to know, they don't need to know about contraception, for example, or you know the concept of contraception is gonna be so far beyond their understanding that there's no, you know, there's no reason why we would be showing them contraception sort of thing. Whereas for some of the others, like, they may be going to be more independent when</p>	<p>Breadth allows for flexibility.</p> <p><i>Shoe on – <u>Forcing or fitting something that doesn't naturally align?</u></i> <i>'fake lesson for ofsted' – <u>navigating the tension between what 'should' be done and what's actually helpful?</u></i> Navigating differences in 'cognitive' and 'physical' age</p> <p>Questioning how students life may play out. <u>Are these the decisions?</u></p> <p>Making it relevant.</p> <p>Some students reality perceived as unaligned with statutory guidance.</p> <p><i>Do not, no reason - <u>Language feels strong. Also why not?</u></i></p>
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<p>The weight of deciding what students need to know in terms of RSE feels beyond teachers' authority. R4</p> <p>In mainstream education a blanket approach is used, often neglecting individual needs and failing to involve collaboration with families. R4</p> <p>Humour helps to alleviate awkwardness of discomfort when discussing sex topics. R4</p> <p>Collaborating with parents allows teachers to share the weight of</p>	<p>they're older. You know, they might be, sharing, you know this the thing they may want to develop a relationship with people when they're older, and that's like something that you can see happening for them. And it's like, right, we therefore do need to really think about what they need to know in terms of sex relationships.</p> <p>Martha: So it sounds like the sort of individualising it and making it relevant then to each sort of individual child and young person is quite key?</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, which is quite a hard call to make like that that feels, you know, having those discussions, particularly with the upper school team. You know, saying like ohh they will, they won't. Like, that seems really like, you know, beyond our authority in some ways. And so a lot of the time is very much in discussion with parents as well like obviously in mainstream you basically just say here's our lessons... are you withdrawing your child from this part of it or not? You don't really get into like, oh, I'm gonna talk to your kid about duh-duh-duh because they're struggling with this. It's very much just, like blanket approach whereas we call up parents and say like? Ohh, you know, they seem to be showing some interest in this so would you like us to work on, you know, appropriate boundaries with you know their friends in class or, you know, compared to with staff sort of thing? It's a lot about, yeah, appropriate behaviour with masturbation comes up a lot (<i>laughs</i>). But something particularly un upper school that we, again it's all about like speaking to the parents and being like, oh, this is, you know, they've been doing this at school (<i>laughs</i>). Like, you know, what do you want? What would you like us to work on with them? You</p>	<p>Navigating variations in need. <u>Needing to make quite substantial predictions about CYPs future to establish relevance.</u></p> <p><u>Feels like a linear decision.</u> <i>'beyond our authority' – appreciating the weight of decisions.</i></p> <p>Sense of differences between SEN and mainstream. <i>'duh-duh-duh' to describe sex topics.</i> <i>'blanket approach' in mainstream.</i> Importance of home-school collaboration, especially in SEN. <u>Sharing the weight of decisions?</u></p> <p><i>Humour around sex topics.</i></p> <p><i>Humour around sex topics.</i></p>
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<p>decisions in RSE, providing a sense of validation. R4-5</p> <p>Struggling to determine whether to support students as small children or as teenager. R5</p> <p>Ongoing dialogues with families allows teachers to support parents/carers through sharing knowledge and resources. R5</p> <p>Whole class RSE is always delivered in the summer term. R5</p>	<p>know, what would you like us to teach them about at home? And because a lot of the time, you know, things that we'd sort of... If you if you were sort of thinking about their developmental stage, a lot of them would be very similar to small children and that would be, you know, something that would be discussed at home and you know, a lot of the very, very early sex and relationship stuff is, you know, at home. Whereas our parents, a lot of them struggle with, you know, teaching new concepts in a much more of a taught way and we've got, you know, resources for, you know, symbols and things like that. And, you know, we can create activities a lot more easily. So it's yeah, very much about like a dialogue with home about like, what have you found and what do you need help with in terms of talking to them about this sort of thing.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. So I guess sort of collaborating with parents is one way that you might try and sort of figure out the needs of each individual child. And so it sounds like you take kind of quite a reactive approach in that way and you know waiting to see where the children are and then what sort of behaviours you're seeing and then kind of-</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, we have, so we have as part of the PSHE curriculum, we'll have a set like a term where we're doing our... So it's the summer term. I don't know why all schools seem to do in the summer and that's when it's on the you know curriculum map as that's when we do it. But, a lot of the time that's when it comes up throughout the year-</p> <p>[home circumstance disruption]</p>	<p><i>Lots of questions. <u>Seeking validation? Confirmation?</u></i></p> <p>Navigating differences in 'cognitive' and 'physical' age. Likened to very young children.</p> <p>Supporting parents with challenges.</p> <p>Sharing knowledge and resources.</p> <p>Structured and bounded timeframe. <u>Why summer?</u></p>
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<p>Fillers help to alleviate any awkwardness of discomfort around sex topics. R6</p> <p>Humour helps to alleviate awkwardness of discomfort when discussing sex topics. R6</p> <p>Teachers need to ensure students privacy around specific issues so as to protect their dignity and not draw attention from peers. R6</p>	<p>Martha: So yeah, so you were saying about the... that you do have the specific curriculum that you?</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah. Yeah. So it's kind of, you know, we've got road safety and you know all those things through the term, you know, safety at school and then goes into a healthy body duh-duh-duh. And then summer time is always RSE. So you know, we'll do some like you know, again depending on the class, like there's, you know, different class styles need different things. But, my class last year, you know, we'd do a block of lessons on RSE, but then, you know, it's potential, there's potential for things to come up earlier in the year that we might teach to like much more of an individual basis. So yeah, one of my boys was, you know, masturbating at school (<i>laughs</i>). So we then did much more of like a one to one thing and again because they're, you know, because the cognitive ability can be so varied sometimes you really do need to... It's being aware of, like privacy and things like that as well. Because, you know, some of the kids in the class were much more sort of aware than him, and so trying not to draw attention to that, you know, in their presence because that's gonna be, you know, not fair on him in terms of his, you know, privacy really. So, yeah, sometimes it has to be very much like individualised, one on one teaching.</p> <p>Martha: And how- can you tell me a bit about your experience of delivering to the whole class?</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah. So we'd kind of do it on the same in the same sort of format that we might do like other lessons. So, things like attention autism, we used for all sorts of different subjects. So we might use it for something like that. Or just,</p>	<p><i>'duh-duh-duh' again. <u>Discomfort?</u></i></p> <p><u>Wonder why it's always summer term?</u></p> <p>Varying between whole class and individualised approach – flexibility again.</p> <p><u>Humour as a way to manage discomfort?</u></p> <p>Protecting and respecting CYPs privacy and dignity.</p> <p>Comparison with wider curriculum.</p> <p>Use of resources.</p>
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<p>Students do not like RSE, finding it embarrassing. R7</p> <p>Supporting students with tendencies towards rigid or dichotomous thinking. R7</p> <p>Important to try and address social justice issues in RSE. R7</p> <p>RSE topics can be confusing rather than helpful. R7</p>	<p>again, it like really depends on the class, so the year before when I had some younger kids when we did RSE. Yeah, their understanding was much, much less than my class last year. And so we, you know, really focused on differentiating between male and female. It was like a big thing and strangers and people we know. It was just like very short, you know, 5 minute input and then like a sorting activity that they do like one-on-one. Whereas my class last year had to be a bit more verbal, you'd have a bit more of a discussion. They find it <u>very</u> embarrassing which is funny (<i>laughs</i>) and you know, very sweet. They really do not like the lessons. And yeah, you, you know, just have it as like a circle time type thing and might have a topic, you know, often it might be like differences between male and female we're working on and looking at, rather than just... We did quite a bit on sort of stereotypical features of male and female and then looking at like, oh, you might meet a man with long hair like you know that's still, you know, still gonna have the same, you know, genitals as a man with short hair sort of thing and trying to get them to understand that concept of, you know, people aren't always exactly as they appear. And also trying to with them, we did try and introduce a little bit of sort of gender fluidity and things like that and again it was a little bit like then you know confusing for them rather than helpful in some ways. So it's very much basing, you know judging their at how they're reacting to the inputs. And then they might do like a bit of an activity based on something. My class we didn't get on to sex at all because they're still, you know, really looking at yeah, differences between male and females. Ohh and like, you know, life cycles, you know, looking babies and you know, talking about pregnancy and that sort of thing. But it yeah, it would just be too advanced,</p>	<p>Safety.</p> <p><i>Humour again.</i> Perceived that CYP 'don't like' the lessons – <u>sense of shame around RSE?</u></p> <p><u>Working with rigidity in thinking?</u></p> <p><u>Value placed on addressing social justice issues.</u></p> <p>'confusing rather than helpful' – again links to importance of making it relevant.</p> <p><u>Expectation that RSE 'should' be about sex? Almost trying to</u></p>
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<p>A sense that not looking at 'sex' explicitly needs to be justified. R8</p> <p>A tension around labelling or categorising the varying cognitive abilities of CYPwLD. R8</p> <p>Verbal discussions allow deeper insight into the way students think. R8</p> <p>It's hard to know how students think and what sparks their</p>	<p>really for them to be looking at sex at that point. And then with the upper school, they did introduce it to some of the kids but not all of them sort of thing.</p> <p>Martha: OK. And have that sort of whole class curriculum there and is that sort of set and then you kind of adapt it in light of what your class needs?</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah. Yeah. So for my class last year we do like a whole class input and then we'd have maybe 3 or 4 differentiated activities. So the sort of <i>(pause)</i> higher group would be maybe working on, you know, sorting and then maybe writing a sentence and then a lot of our work is like they do a lot of symbol matching, sorting, you know, creating picture of things, that sort of thing. A lot of them are nonverbal, that's what's tricky as well because I think generally in mainstream for RSE, so much of it is conversation and you know with my, like mainstream like year three and four class like a big chunk of it was like ask me any questions you have? Like what have you been thinking about? What have you been worrying about? And you know the stuff that they've come out with like so much of the lesson would just be chatting about, you know, I remember them asking like why do boys have nipples? You get into this whole like chat about it and that would be and then you'd get more from that. Whereas because, yeah, so many of our kids are nonverbal it's very hard to know what they think about, you know, such complex things. You know, we know a lot about things that they want, things that they need, but sort of more abstract stuff, like, what they think about their own body is very hard to work out. And you know, and so it ends up being a lot of, you know, labelling,</p>	<p><u>justifying not teaching about it explicitly.</u></p> <p>Adapting to a range of needs within class groups. <u>Hesitation around labelling/categorising CYP based on need/ability?</u></p> <p>Differences between teaching and expectations in mainstream vs SEN.</p> <p>Value of verbal discussions.</p> <p>Discussions allow insight into CYPs thinking. <u>Lack of discussions increases sense of uncertainty/not knowing?</u> Limited feedback. Importance of RSE being relevant to CYP.</p>
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<p>curiosity, necessitating the management of uncertainty. R8-9</p> <p>Humour can help to alleviate feelings of discomfort. R9</p> <p>RSE can be embarrassing for students. R9</p> <p>Light hearted approaches to RSE can help to model normalisation of topics. R9</p> <p>Navigating the discrepancy in cognitive and physical age. R9</p> <p>RSE can be embarrassing for some students. R9</p>	<p>asking them to label something or asking to point to different body parts but the actual like opinions and things or things that they're curious about, it's hard to know really.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. And you said that they, you seem like they kind of don't really like it or they find it difficult. How do you kind of know that? What do you see in them?</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, it's kind of it depends on their personalities, like some of them, like the three boys I'm thinking of you could kind of tease them out of it, you know (<i>laughs</i>). But you know, say oh, I know, I know it's uncomfortable talking about a penis (<i>laughs</i>). You know, things like that, and they'd laugh, but, you know, be yeah just kind of trying not to embarrass them too much basically, but being clear, you know, it's OK to talk about these things like you know every, you know, everyone's got a body.</p> <p>Martha: And what sort of emotions do you think they have around it?</p> <p>Rosie: I think it's very similar to say if you were talking to an five year old about it in some ways. You know they're aware that they're boys and you know there's girls in the class and it's, you know, it's the teachers might be girls and things, you know. And I think it's just that, you know, embarrassment that, you know, comes with that. And just very personalities about some of them are no embarrassment whatsoever.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, and how do you experience delivering it within yourself?</p>	<p><i>'hard to know' again – <u>uncertainty difficult to manage?</u></i></p> <p><i><u>Again humour to manage discomfort?</u></i></p> <p><i>'Uncomfortable'</i></p> <p><i>'trying not to embarrass them' – <u>sense of shame around RSE.</u></i></p> <p>Normalising sex/RSE.</p> <p>Likened to young children.</p> <p><i>Embarrassing again. Some find it embarrassing some don't.</i></p>
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<p>Rosie feels comfortable with RSE whereas some colleagues don't. R10</p> <p>Taking a more relaxed approach to RSE fosters a more comfortable atmosphere, reducing cultural tension. R10</p> <p>Cultural barriers to RSE in mainstream can be frustrating. R10</p> <p>RSE is inevitable, but it's safer for students to access it within school rather than relying on information from peers. R10</p> <p>Stronger home-school relationships within SEN foster</p>	<p>Rosie: You know, I don't mind it, but a lot of people do struggle with it, particularly some of our TA's, and because we have quite big TA teams. So I've I have like four or five TA's in each class and so sometimes the TAs might be delivering part of it, or maybe to a small group, something they hate doing. I think it's just real sort of British uptightness in some ways (<i>laughs</i>) in some ways, just a bit uncomfortable for them sometimes, but I don't, I don't mind.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. So there's some cultural stuff there as well. And do you get? Anything more broadly about, like culturally cultural differences or anything?</p> <p>Rosie: Do you mean like with like cultural differences with the kids and things that come up or?</p> <p>Martha: Yeah like or parents or staff maybe.</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, yeah, actually. It doesn't come up as much as it did in mainstream and mainstream was very much like every year in my school in [local authority name] we might have like a reasonably large section of the class that would get withdrawn from RSE because of religious reasons, which is always quite frustrating because you need to sort of try and explain to parents, you know, they're gonna hear it from the other kids basically like, you know, they're better off hearing it from us than they are from their peers sort of thing and it just doesn't come up so much in SEN. I think because we have way more of a dialogue with the parents about individual lessons and things like that than we would do in mainstream, and I think particularly at my school, there's definitely just much more trust from the parents in some</p>	<p><i>'I don't mind' – expressing comfort with topic. <u>Slightly contradictory to humour and duh-duh-duh. Maybe that's because the humour works?</u></i></p> <p><i>'they hate doing' – discomfort from some staff</i></p> <p><i>'British uptightness' – cultural nuances</i></p> <p><i><u>Comfort around the subject tends to be related to personal values maybe?</u></i></p> <p>Comparison with mainstream - Less of an impact of culture/religion in SEN than mainstream</p> <p><i>Cultural barriers can be 'frustrating'</i></p> <p>More value placed on formal teaching – <u>potentially safer?</u></p> <p>Established trust in home-school relationships.</p>
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<p>The bond between staff and students almost resembles that of a family. R12</p> <p>Collaboration with staff and families helps to reduce the ambiguity of not knowing what should be taught. R12</p> <p>Risk that teachers may not do the right thing in RSE. R12</p> <p>RSE is not always about covering content. R12</p>	<p>been with them, you know, they've known them since they were tiny so I think because we know the kids so well, you might go and speak to somebody, you know, their teacher who had them last year or one of the TA's. The TA's often go up with them as well through the school, and so you sort of say like ohh, did you ever find this with so and so? And they said, oh, yeah, yeah, yeah and you know, their mum said this and, you know, that came up two years ago. And so there's a lot of, you know, just discussion about like what is going to be right for that child and do you know, do you think we need to go and call Dad, mum and Dad about this? And so yeah, I think a lot of, yeah, discussion about what, what the right thing to do and say is, yeah, happens a lot.</p> <p>Martha: It sounds like there's an importance of relationships, I guess then, in making sure that you're –</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, definitely, definitely. And for lots of them, you know, for a big chunk of our kids, if they're PMLD or if their very severely autistic and they're very, you know, just they're on like a sensory curriculum, basically, where they're not, they're not looking at covering <u>content</u> as such, it's very much just based on their sensory needs. They're sort of, the way we'd like doing RSE with them is very much based on relationships. So for our PMLD kids like their PSHE target might be to show preference for an adult you know, and that might just be that they move in a slightly different way that the team around them knows means that they prefer that the person, cause the kids all prefer certain people and you know they and building up things like doing intensive interaction with some of our like severely autistic kids like</p>	<p>Close relationships with CYP since early years – <u>almost familial?</u></p> <p>Ongoing communication – deep sense of CYPs needs and progress. <u>Increased sense of 'knowing'?</u></p> <p><i>'what's going to be right' – <u>as opposed to doing something wrong?</u></i> <i>Wanting to do the 'right thing'</i></p> <p><u>Value placed on the idea of 'content'?</u></p> <p>Supporting CYP to develop relationships</p> <p><i>'that's their RSE... content' – <u>again, almost feels like a need to justify</u></i></p>
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<p>Feeling the need to rationalise teaching approaches that diverge from traditional content. R13</p> <p>Teachers and students have different thinking styles. R13</p> <p>Tension in categorising students based on cognitive abilities that feels less difficult within core subjects. R13</p>	<p>that is them building a relationship with one specific member of the team and that's kind of their RSE, you know, content.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, so having a positive relationship with the adult then it's quite helpful and then you know making sure that they're getting the most appropriate sort of teaching?</p> <p>Rosie: Yes, definitely. Yeah, yeah.</p> <p>Martha: Ah ok, that's really interesting. And are there any sort of key experiences that come to mind for you? Like ones that really stand out of any that you've delivered.</p> <p>Rosie: I think my yeah, the my class I had two years ago. We were working like all term on boys and girls and we had like an even split five boys, five girls in the class and from like our point of view it seems like so obvious you know the difference, and the girls we had were very girly girls. They had, you know, had <u>long</u> hair that was always down there. And they, you know, they all wore dresses to school (<i>laughs</i>), you know, they didn't have to but they were just very girly girls and, you know, a couple of the kids were sort of on the more able end, and you know, we're working like using... It's all so hard to know how to say it, but higher, slightly higher up I suppose you say in things like maths and English and so we were thinking like ohh you know this is gonna be quite a straightforward concept, and they just did not get it at all. You know, all term you'd be saying, you know, is [unintelligible] a boy or girl and they had no idea, you know, random guesswork every time. And I thought that was just so interesting because they were obviously just not classifying people how we did and they were just not it, it's</p>	<p><u>teaching away from the traditional sense.</u></p> <p><i>'from our point of view' – neurodivergence. Different thinking processes.</i></p> <p>Some difficult feelings about labelling groups again – less discomfort in core subjects.</p> <p><i>'interesting'</i></p>
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<p>CYPwLD have a lesser sense of difference than neurotypical teachers. R14</p> <p>Working with CYPwLD has led Rosie to reflect on her own values and narratives pushed within society. R14</p> <p>Questioning whether it is right to impose socially constructed narratives onto CYPwLD. R14</p> <p>Questioning the importance of adhering to the curriculum in RSE when it's applied more flexibly in other subjects. R14</p>	<p>almost like it was completely irrelevant to them. And I sort of thought like, why are we pushing this so much? <i>(laughs)</i> Like, does it really matter that much? Do we really need them to know the difference between boy and girl? At this point, if they seemingly do not care, you know, they're very intrigued by what class are they, know who's in our class and they could sort very happily on things like that. But the boy and girl was almost like, just like, why are you asking me this? Like what? What? What are you trying to? The concept of there being a difference between, you know, and having these two symbols and us saying "like look at all these people, they're all boys". They just couldn't see a commonality between them and I thought that was really interesting cause I just thought like is this therefore the right thing to be doing with them? If it doesn't matter to them like, is it relevant to their life at this point? So yeah, I'd probably say that.</p> <p>Martha: That's interesting, because I think it links to some of the other things you've been saying before a bit about kind of about societal expectations in a way –</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.</p> <p>Martha: And, how that kind of maybe doesn't match your teaching?</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, just like how, I don't know how like how important is it? You know, that they that they know it and is it such like a crucial part of the curriculum? And I think so much, you know, the rest of our curriculum is very much like it's, you know, not based on national curriculum at all really,</p>	<p><i>Lots of questions. <u>Questioning own values/societal values?</u></i></p> <p>CYP have a lesser sense of difference – again brining own values/societal values into question.</p> <p><i>'interesting' – again</i> <i>'right thing' – <u>again linear sense of right and wrong</u></i> <i>Almost tarnishing their innocence?</i> <i>Lots of questions again. <u>Seeking answers?</u></i></p> <p><i>'how important is it?' – <u>questioning influence of broader societal structures over teaching</u></i></p>
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<p>Preparing students for their future beyond school. R15</p> <p>Easier to know how core subjects will translate into CYPs realities. R15</p> <p>Working out how RSE will translate into students lived experience. R15</p> <p>Working backwards from ambiguous predictions. R15</p>	<p>it's completely separate. It's like a whole separate thing because a lot of the time they're working on self-help skills like you know their target for term or the year even, might be to be doing up their buttons and so like and that's what's important for them is, you know, we're trying to look at their future beyond school really, and think about like, what is actually going to be useful for their lives. And we, you know, it's all based backwards from that, really. We do do as much of the, you know, core subjects as we can because you know obviously reading and maths and stuff is going to be useful for them but it's so based in what scenarios are they actually going to encounter, you know, and keeping it like as real life as possible really. And you know, we try and do that in mainstream as well, but it's much more like you know here's the academics sort of thing, and so I think it's trying to work out where RSE actually fits in to that because you know again you're thinking about what is going to be important to them. It's very, yeah, very much relationships with other people, relationships with their peers, some of the more in depth stuff just isn't going to be relevant for them. So yeah, it's just trying to work backwards from that really.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, relevance is definitely something that is coming up as sort of quite a key thing that you're talking about, I think and do you think is your sort of? Maybe have you been in the same school for like quite some time?</p> <p>Rosie: Just three years. Yeah, not that long.</p> <p>Martha: And have you been working in SEN at all before that or?</p>	<p>RSE is more aligned with national curriculum than other subjects.</p> <p>Preparing for adulthood.</p> <p>Core subjects less ambiguous.</p> <p>Making it relevant. <u>Sense of school bridging the gap to adulthood.</u></p> <p>Comparison with mainstream.</p> <p><i>What is going to be important to them</i></p> <p>Working backwards from the goal.</p>
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<p>Transitioning into SEN teaching is like an entirely different job. R16</p> <p>Transitioning into SEN teaching was like being an NQT again. R16</p> <p>Naïve to the differences between mainstream and SLD settings. R16</p> <p>Positive feelings towards supporting CYP with SEND. R16</p> <p>Shocked by the complexity and severity of CYPs needs in SEN. R16</p>	<p>Rosie: No, just mainstream school.</p> <p>Martha: Ah, so just mainstream before and then you went into SEN. And have you seen much of a change over the last three years since you've been –</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, yeah.</p> <p>Martha: How would you say it has changed?</p> <p>Rosie: What would you say the difference is? Almost like an entirely different job to be honest. It was quite like a shock in some ways, because I think I'd got to the point, I'd been doing, you know, six years in mainstream primary and so I'd felt like I'd got to the point where I was quite confident. And then, starting at my school now was very much like being an NQT again. Like, I had no idea what I was doing a lot of the time, and I think as well I hadn't really appreciated the difference between an SLD school and you know, an MLD school. And I think the kids that I'd worked with SEN in mainstream that you know, that was why I wanted to go into SEN because I just loved working with the kids in mainstream in my classes. There was like those kids, you know, it's a certain spectrum of needs and the kids at my school, it's so much more severe that I hadn't really realised. I actually, to be honest, I hadn't even realised they existed. In some ways I didn't realise that you could have quite such severe autism, for example, or you know, Down Syndrome plus autism sort of thing and that, you know, you could have a whole class of kids who were completely nonverbal sensory seeking, that sort of thing. So, just the entire way of structuring their lessons and things like that. I mean things</p>	<p>Comparison with mainstream - <i>'entirely different job'</i>.</p> <p>Confident in mainstream. 'like being an NQT again' – <u>big knock in job confidence.</u> <u>Uncertainty/not knowing/naïve?</u></p> <p>Loved working with SEN CYP as a mainstream teacher.</p> <p>Severity of need can be overwhelming/shocking.</p>
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<p>Adapting and growing into new role. R17</p> <p>Feeling somewhat foolish or naïve when reflecting on past teaching strategies. R17</p> <p>Difference in SEN approaches feels alien. R17</p> <p>Embracing the steep learning curve was a rewarding journey of growth and self-discovery. R17</p> <p>Mainstream education feels like inauthentic assembly-line slog, prioritising uniformity. R17</p> <p>New and exciting, yet humbling, beginnings. R17</p>	<p>like attention autism I had never heard of before. I've never done anything close to that in mainstream and intensive interaction and even things that you know using symbols so much. You know in mainstream I'd done like use the visual timetable and sometimes, sometimes I would just write it (<i>laughs</i>). But that you know, using symbols for absolutely every part of school life and that that for some kids, that is like <u>the most</u> like important thing, that you've got a relevant symbol for it. Otherwise, they don't understand what's going on. Like, that was just so alien to me. So it was like a very steep learning curve (<i>laughs</i>), but amazing like, it's very, very rewarding. And just, yeah, that sort of celebrating the very, very tiny steps of progress that they make is, you know, so different to mainstream which is so focused on like are they reaching their like end of year attainment goals? And you know it's just this constant like slog to get them all up to the same point. With SEN it's so much more about you know that child and their like tiny bit of progress in something, rather than like desperately trying to cover as much content as possible.</p> <p>Martha: So do you feel like you're... It sounds like it was quite tough going into SEN at the at start and do you feel –</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's tough it was. I really, like, loved it immediately. It was like, very, it was quite exciting to be honest, to, like, find something that was so like motivating because I was at a bit of a dead end, burn out with mainstream. And so just, yeah to suddenly be like, oh, this is so much more interesting and rewarding. But it was, it was quite like humbling, so I had to be very like, you know, going and asking people constantly for help with everything.</p>	<p>New beginnings. Big transition.</p> <p>Reflecting on changed perspectives - <i>laughing at past self</i>. Learning. Taking steps back.</p> <p>'Alien' 'steep learning curve'</p> <p>Amazing/rewarding/celebrating.</p> <p>Mainstream as a slog. <u>Feels robotic.</u> <u>Almost inauthentic. Mentioned to content again – gold standard?</u></p> <p>Loved it/motivating/exciting</p> <p>Dead-end/burnout</p> <p>Interesting/rewarding yet humbling</p>
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<p>Working in SEN can be an emotional roller coaster at times. R18</p> <p>Feelings of ambivalence towards teaching in SEN. R18</p> <p>Positive working relationships with colleagues important in shaping teaching experiences. R18</p>	<p>Martha: Yeah, it sounds like your school, I mean from the way you're talking about it, it sounds like you've got a very supportive kind of staff body –</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, yeah. No, it is great. It's great in so many ways. I mean, it's horrifically tough like a lot of the time like, yeah we're quite well staffed compared to some other SEN schools. But it doesn't feel like it. So you know, as soon as we've got one person off and they're not covered, we really struggle for cover. You know, we have a lot of agency workers who come in to cover TA roles and that's very difficult because if they don't know the kids, it can cause, you know, it's really hard and we have some really, really extreme behaviour so that that's very challenging at times like, yeah, especially, yeah, doing it pregnant was not fun, you know, really, really stressful. So there's like, yeah, pros and cons and it's really, it is a very close team because you're almost, it's so different to mainstream because you know mainstream, you've got like you, maybe a TA, and then you're just with all these kids all day and you know your relationships are very much with your class, the kids, you know. And you're just talking to the kids all day, whereas, in my school now you know there's you and four other adults and then, you know, maybe 8-9 kids, a lot of who don't speak. So you're working with the adults, but very, very closely and it's very much like a team thing, and sometimes that goes well and sometimes it's very difficult.</p> <p>Martha: Do you think, because it sound it sounds like you're sort of RSE experiences of generally being like quite positive in that you talk about them quite positive manner. Do you</p>	<p><u>Big contrast in language used to describe experiences of SEN vs mainstream</u></p> <p><u>'Great' yet 'horrifically tough' – bit of a roller-coaster it seems.</u></p> <p>Role is demanding.</p> <p>Relationships with CYP very important.</p> <p>Genuine risks to safety - <i>Not fun/stressful</i> Ambivalence</p> <p>Differences between mainstream and SEN</p> <p>Sense of teamwork – <u>co-worker relationships crucial.</u></p>
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<p>Fear of doing the wrong thing. R20</p> <p>Wanting an expert who can bring clarity on what is deemed right or wrong. R20</p> <p>Fillers to mitigate feelings of discomfort or awkwardness. R20</p> <p>Not knowing what happens to students once they leave school. R20</p> <p>Navigating differences in thinking between staff and students. R20</p>	<p>Rosie: I think because it feels more, it feels more sort of crucial that you get it right? I think things like, you know, the maths and the English curriculum, you can't go too far wrong if you're covering numbers (<i>laughs</i>), like you know you're doing, you're reading, teaching them to read as much as you can, you know, like we're looking at stories like it's hard to see how you could go very wrong with that. Whereas, I think something so crucial as like, you know, consent. It would be useful to have somebody, you know, who's an expert in adults with autism, for example, and who knows about the relationships that people with severe learning difficulties have when they're older. Who could actually say 'oh by the way, you know, the adults that we're getting out of school, they could really have done with some more work on, you know, appropriate touch or you know duh-duh-duh'. Because, I don't think we have that really. I think, like as a staff body we don't have a huge amount of experience with adults beyond once they've left school like, we don't really know like what happens to them in some ways? Like some of our, some of our team have got adult kids who have got learning difficulties and that's quite helpful. But you know, there's not many, and there's, you know, there's a lot of variation and so yeah, just having people who work with adults almost coming back and saying, 'this is what would be useful', I think. I think cause obviously in mainstream, like, you are the adults. You know, there's neurotypical people, so we know like what we need as, or what we could have used as kids, whereas it's a bit different.</p>	<p><i>'getting it right'</i></p> <p><i>Wrong</i></p> <p><i>Wrong – quite linear</i></p> <p><i>Need for an 'expert' – <u>wanting someone who knows?</u></i></p> <p><i>'duh-duh-duh'</i></p> <p>Uncertainty around impact of RSE and life post-16.</p> <p>Need for feedback Making it relevant Neurodivergence – <u>differences in thinking between staff and students</u></p>
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<p>Knowing that adult services are much worse. R21</p> <p>Adult services are awful and depressing. R21</p> <p>Leaving the safety of the school environment for adult services can feel like entering the daunting big bad world. R21</p> <p>Preparing students to transition into new environments is filled with a familial sense of protection and responsibility. R21</p>	<p>Martha: OK. So it sounds like you've got you feel quite a high level of maybe responsibility with your RSE teaching, maybe, more so than other subjects?</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, definitely. I think as well because of things like the funding stopping when they, you know, get to 25, and I think we just know from, you know, from parents of previous pupils and from like staff who are parents, like adult services are just so much worse. I don't know if that's just [local authority], but you know the, it's just so, they have so much less support once they turn 25 and even really once they turn 19 a lot of the time. Like we had some teachers go and visit the college where a lot of our kids go and they were like, oh, it was actually really awful and depressing because it was just so much worse than what we provide them in terms of structure and resources, and you know, all the individualised curriculum and stuff. They just don't get that anymore. So I think, yeah, we feel quite a lot of responsibility for preparing them for not having us anymore. And, you know, being in school is such like a major thing for them. Like, their like their life like for so many of them like their routine with school and everything is like crucial for them, you know, being regulated and everything and you know. And for the parents as well. So I think the options once they leave school are so much more difficult to manage and like to access. So I think yeah, there's quite a lot of yeah, responsibility that we feel a lot of responsibility for getting them ready to go.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. And especially because you have such strong relationships with them as well –</p>	<p>Negative views around adult services.</p> <p>Systemic battles</p> <p><i>Adult services perceived as 'awful and depressing' – <u>strong language, paints a really grim picture.</u></i></p> <p><u>Sending them off into the big bad world in adult services. School as safe. Feels familial.</u></p> <p><i>'getting them reading to go' – <u>familial sense of protection.</u></i></p>
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<p>Long-standing relationships with staff evokes strong emotions when students leave, as the bonds formed over time create a deep sense of attachment. R22</p> <p>Difficulty managing feelings of responsibility. R22</p> <p>School is a safe environment. R22</p> <p>Distrust in other services. R22</p>	<p>Rosie: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. The leavers thing at the end of each, cause I mean I've only been there three years, but like the leavers thing at the end of every year, when they some of them have been there you know for 15 years sort of thing. It's always very emotional. And they have all these pictures from when they're really little and everything.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. So and how do you sort of find that level of, especially with RSE, where it's such an important subjects in terms of their safety and everything, and how do you find that sort of feeling of responsibility within yourself?</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah. Yeah, it's tricky yeah. Because teaching them to advocate for themselves.. Some of them can do that, and some really, really can't. And that's, you know, quite a scary thing really. And school again, it's like, feels like a very safe environment from a safeguarding perspective. You know, we just don't know what it's going to be like for them. So that's, yeah, I mean, that's how, we do a lot of their targets are about self-help and independence, and for loads of them that's things like toileting. Because that's like a major safeguarding thing, like if we can get them toilet trained and so they're not having to rely on somebody changing them. That's like a major thing. You know, one for their like confidence, but yeah, two from a safeguarding perspective and yeah so that's often, like, that's more of our focus I would say when coming to RSE is about, yes, self-help skills. They've all got a self-help target, you know, throughout the year sort of thing and a lot of the time that's things like dressing and toileting.</p>	<p>Long relationships with staff. <i>'very emotional' seeing them leave.</i></p> <p><i>Tricky again. <u>Describes tensions?</u></i></p> <p><u>'scary' – reality of students vulnerability.</u> School as a safe space.</p> <p>Safeguarding – children being able to advocate for themselves. <u>Lack of trust in other services.</u> <u>Almost like a group mentality?</u></p>
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<p>Struggling with accessing appropriate resources due to outdated materials. R23</p>	<p>Martha: Well, OK, yeah, I know that makes a lot of sense. Yeah. Well, it sounds like it's quite an sort of emotional experience in in ways, I think, and is there anything in terms of like, hopes for the future? I know you've talked quite a lot about you know guidance and maybe having more specific guidance to help with those sorts of difficult feelings I guess with responsibility and everything. Is there anything else that you think would be helpful for you know for hopes going forward?</p> <p>Rosie: I mean resources is always great. It's a bit of a tricky one cause we end up making a lot of our own resources to sort of fit our lesson style. But if there were more resources that would be great. Places like Twinkle actually have started doing a lot more SEN resources which are really good. I haven't actually checked what they've got in terms of our RSE, but they may well have stuff, but sort of recently, like last year, we were using stuff that was basically from the 80s. It's like these really funny cartoons of naked people. So, more like up-to-date resources is always a good thing.</p> <p>Martha: And that sort of it sounded like more were you saying about having that experts do you think that collaboration maybe between –</p> <p>Rosie: Yeah, definitely. Because things like using widget, you know the symbolising programme, like I'd never heard of it before I started here, and we use it for every single lesson, like everything around school. Like it's such a crucial part of our, you know, <u>all</u> our lessons basically. And so having resources that are 'widgeted' as we call it, would be, you know, that takes so much time, you know? And, you</p>	<p>Outdated resources – difficult to access appropriate ones</p>
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<p>Feeling constantly rushed due to the time demands and pressures of the role. R24</p>	<p>know, we're always trying to, we're always in a rush. So having resources that were already made that were appropriate. You know, I was having to make my own penis widget symbol like, trying to find the card like an appropriate cartoon (<i>laughs</i>). And like screenshotting it and putting it in. And if that sort of stuff is already made that's always helpful, you know.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. So time saving, I guess in that way as well. So resources, some collaboration, and yeah. And is there anything that you kind of haven't talked about that you think would be helpful to know? For me to know?</p> <p>Rosie: No, I think I think that's everything. Yeah, I was trying to think I was trying to think what I should mention. Yeah, I think that's everything I was going to mention.</p> <p>Martha: Alright lovely, well thank you for that I'll stop the recording.</p>	<p><i>'we're always in a rush' – time demands of role.</i></p> <p><i>Humour around sex topics.</i></p>
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Jennifer's interview

Experiential statements	Transcript	Exploratory notes (Descriptive, <i>linguistic</i> , conceptual)
<p>Supporting a range of needs in RSE teaching. Je1</p> <p>RSE teaching is enjoyable and interesting. Je1</p> <p>Adapting teaching to accommodate a wide range of needs and abilities. Je1</p> <p>Hesitation or sensitivity around labelling abilities. Je1</p>	<p>Martha: All right. So I'll start with my opening question, which is please tell me about your experience of delivering relationships and sex education to children and young people with learning difficulties?</p> <p>Jennifer: So, the school that I currently work at is a school for pupils with severe learning difficulties, mainly autism, but kind of a range of learning difficulties really, and I've worked here for - I think this is my fifth year that I've worked here now, and I'm the RSHE <u>lead</u> teacher. So, I do a lot of the RSHE teaching at this site, which has been really interesting, I really enjoy it. So I guess my experience, at the moment, is working with a really broad <u>range</u> of abilities because we have pupils - we have pre-verbal pupils all the way up to, what we describe as, formal learners who are kind of learners who can have sit down sessions about things, like, in a more <u>traditional</u> sense. And we, the way we teach RSHE here is we group the pupils into kind of, kind of abilities. You don't call it abilities, but it's basically ability groups. Just because, obviously the content is going to be very different depending on the kind of learner they are. So our RSHE curriculum looks very different for - depending on like what like learner pathway they're on, so we call our learners pre-formal learners, semi-formal learners and formal learners. Our pre-formal learners tend to have a very different experience of the curriculum to the formal learners. I - the way I've been kind of, kind of worked out the curriculum since the guidance came in is, because obviously</p>	<p>Supporting a range of needs.</p> <p>RSE is an enjoyable experience. <i>Interesting</i> Adapting to a range of needs/abilities.</p> <p>Traditional teaching – formal learners. <i>Kind of abilities... you don't call it abilities - <u>Some hesitation around ability grouping perhaps?</u></i></p> <p>Higher 'ability' means children are more 'formal learners'</p> <p>Difference in learning experiences depending on ability groups.</p>

<p>RSE involves a hierarchy with 'sex' as the ultimate goal in the curriculum structure. Je3</p> <p>Decision-making regarding which learners will access certain levels of the curriculum. Je3</p> <p>Hard to decide who will and who won't cover various topics. Je3</p> <p>Navigating ethical dilemmas. Je3</p>	<p>rules based approach, so it's like, it basically gives you different definitions of people in your life so like, they don't use the term stranger but they'd say 'other person I don't know' and then it shows them what they can do with that person. So, 'other person I don't know' would be nothing; 'community worker I don't know' would be you can talk, you can shake hands, you can help them or get help from them, and you can like them; and it kind of looks like it basically goes off a big scale, it's like a pyramid scale. So sort of, it's based like a rules based thing. Now, the <u>real</u> version of this goes all the way up to sexual relationships, but we've sort of decided as a school that not all of our learners will be taught that content because it's not relevant to their age and stage, for a lot of our learners, so they'll have sex education, their sex education would look very different. It would be much more about learning about private and public spaces, learning about keeping themselves safe, you know, learning about like masturbation would be included and things like that. But it wouldn't be, we wouldn't sit them down and say like, "this is someone having sex," kind of thing. Whereas our formal learners <u>will</u> have, do cover that within their sessions so they'll be learning about kind of the intricacies of sexual relationships and that's been quite a hard decision to make, because obviously the guidance was that all pupils should have equal opportunity access to this, but when we look at our learners and obviously, like I say, cognitively a lot of them are under two years old, really. It just doesn't seem <u>appropriate</u> or <u>relevant</u> to teach them that part of the curriculum at this stage in their lives.</p> <p>Martha: And so how do you kind of go about making those decisions?</p>	<p>Having to decide which learners will need to access certain levels of the pyramid – <u>pyramid almost feels like a hierarchy with 'sex' at the top? Is that the goal?</u></p> <p>Some will learn about sex some won't. <u>Seems to be the key decision.</u></p> <p><i>Hard decision to make</i></p> <p>Equal opportunities yet having to decide who will access what – <u>professional and ethical dilemma?</u></p>
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<p>Grappling with the daunting task of crafting a bespoke curriculum for 'less able learners,'. Je5</p> <p>Needing to trust her own expertise. Je5</p> <p>Consistent session formats help students stay engaged. Je5</p> <p>Seeing students' motivated by the sessions brings satisfaction, providing a sense of validation in teaching approaches. Je5</p>	<p>general like Twinkle resources and things like that. So I can kind of get ideas from places like that, whereas with our less able learners, it's much more like I have to come up with it all myself.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, yeah, so there's a lot of thinking kind of on the spot, would you say? And how do your learners kind of respond to the teaching?</p> <p>Jennifer: The less able?</p> <p>Martha: Yeah.</p> <p>Jennifer: I would say they're generally, I mean they're generally quite engaged within sessions. The sessions with them, like I say, would look very different. So they'd be much more like static, so kind of similar sessions each week with a little bit of development, but kind of generally broadly speaking, like they're following a very similar structure and formula which they like, because most of them have autism, so the kind of predictability of it is really helpful I think for them, and I guess because there's a lot of use of like games and songs within those sessions, they're quite motivated often by music, we might show like simple cartoon videos and things like that which they can also be quite motivated by. So, yeah, generally they're, they're pretty motivated by the sessions, which is great.</p> <p>Martha: Ohh that is really nice. And what would you say has been like a big experience, maybe of success for you, in your like less formal learners?</p>	<p>Having to come up with it independently is harder – <u>more open / subjectivity challenging?</u></p> <p>Students enjoy the sessions. Predictability and motivating activities help.</p> <p>Happy to see them motivated by sessions.</p>
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<p>Noticing perceptually tiny steps is imperative in celebrating students achievements. Je6</p> <p>Success is relative. Je6</p> <p>Humility in reluctance to solely attribute a student's progress to her RSE sessions. Je6</p> <p>Acknowledging the scarier side of RSE. Je6</p>	<p>Jennifer: Sorry, say that again. The microphone is a bit -</p> <p>Martha: That's all right. And so have you got, like, a sort of moment that you recall as being quite a big success maybe in your less able learners?</p> <p>Jennifer: I guess, I mean success looks so different for them because like - tiny tiny - something that might be seen as like a very small bit of progress for someone would be a big, a big achievement for them. So I guess, a pupil being able to communicate when he had pain in an area of his, in a <u>private</u> area of his body, and he was able to indicate where that pain was using like a visual support system, so like a communication board. I mean, whether that had come through the sessions or other teaching it's unclear, but you know, if it did come from the sessions then that's great that he can obviously identify those parts of his body, because for that particular learner, that is a huge part of the curriculum for him.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, so it's like looking at those individual successes, I guess then really. And it sounds like that's quite you know quite high level of responsibility really like being able to teach a child, like to communicate pain and that sort of thing that's really important for their health then, is that something that you kind of get a lot of that sort of like responsibility I guess with it?</p> <p>Jennifer: Yeah, definitely. I mean it is always quite worrying to me, anyway, that a lot of our peoples can't communicate that, or struggle to communicate that, because then you also think about like the kind of scarier side of this topic, which is</p>	<p>Success or progress is subjective and relative</p> <p>RSE potentially allowed a child to communicate a health need – <u>positive RSE outcomes maybe not what one would 'traditionally' expect?</u> <u>Hesitation around taking ownership of the achievement?</u></p>
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<p>RSE is paramount in ensuring that students have the skills necessary to keep themselves safe. Je7</p> <p>Students are fascinated with RSE topics and the novelty of information. Je7</p> <p>Increased access to RSE is vital for students, reflecting a sense that it should be a core element of the curriculum. Je7</p> <p>Students' active participation indicates a level of understanding and interest, contributing to a sense of fulfilment. Je7</p>	<p>obviously like, and the <u>real statistics</u> which show that you know pupils with special needs are really much more vulnerable and open to, and more statistically likely to be abused and things like that. So, it's so paramount that as part of this curriculum they can kind of learn to identify and communicate things or parts of their body correctly.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, no absolutely. Alright, so then with your more like formal learners, as you say, what's been your experiences with that? I know you said it's a little bit <u>easier</u>, and how is it to sort of teach learners at that stage?</p> <p>Jennifer: Yeah, I mean it's, they're very, <u>they're very</u> engaged by the topic because they're sort of fascinated by it and I guess, maybe prior to the new guidance coming out, they weren't getting as much exposure to this kind of information. And I guess also because of the new rules around like exclusion it's now much harder for parents to exclude from it, like some of them might have previously been excluded and now are having access to the information which is kind of vital in my opinion. They, yeah, they really, you get the feeling they really enjoy the sessions and kind of ask very relevant questions during sessions. The sessions I guess for them would look much more, kind of similar to a mainstream session in that I will deliver information from the front, we might do a few activities as a whole class, then they might go off and do some work on their own. So it's quite kind of, yeah, quite a kind of mainstream format but we have had pupil's sort of opening up about their own feelings about things within those sessions, which has been really positive, and we've done a lot around kind of different types of relationships and, and</p>	<p><i>Worrying</i> that students are unable to communicate their needs in relation to RSE</p> <p>Scary reality of RSE for CYPwLD</p> <p>Students engaged with RSE, potentially because the information is new to them</p> <p>More challenging for parents to exclude so more students are accessing - <i>RSE is vital</i>. <u>Sense that RSE is a core subject</u>.</p> <p>Get the feeling that students enjoys the lessons – ask relevant questions – <u>shows understanding</u></p> <p>RSE allows students to open up about their feelings</p> <p>Lessons have supported students in understanding themselves better –</p>
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<p>RSE lessons can facilitate a positive environment for self-expression and self-discovery, which is rewarding for Jennifer. Je8</p> <p>Navigating parental anxiety and misconceptions surrounding RSE. Je8</p> <p>Grappling with respecting parents views while upholding the importance of comprehensive RSE, reflecting on the challenges of balancing external and internal dilemmas. Je8</p> <p>Holding parental anxiety and concerns, addressing fears and misconceptions. Je8</p> <p>Stuck in an internal grapple with ethical dilemmas in the absence of guidance. Je8</p>	<p>pupil's sort of - we've had peoples realising that they (<i>pause</i>), you know, have feelings too towards maybe the same sex or and, and that I guess those sessions have enabled them to maybe feel a bit more secure about their feelings, which has been really nice. Obviously, the flip side of that is we have a lot of parents who get very anxious about this curriculum because they think we're sort of teaching them how to be part of the LGBTQ plus community and things like that (<i>laughs</i>). So it's, the way I look at it is, I'm like, I'm not, I'm obviously not teaching them <u>either way</u>, I'm just exposing them to everything that they're gonna come across in the world and they can then make up their own mind and choices around that.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. And how have you experienced working with parents?</p> <p>Jennifer: It's very mixed. I've done a lot of work with parents, so we offer like parent, we've - I've done sort of a few parent consultations about the new curriculum because there was a lot of anxiety, I think particularly from parents of less able learners, you know, when they saw the word 'sex' they completely panicked and thought that I was going to be, you know, teaching the same content to their child as someone who has a much better understanding. So a lot of it was around just reassuring them that this is what the curriculum looks like for this pupil, this learner, and it looks very different to a different learner. (<i>pause</i>) I guess something that I, like an internal grapple that I have, like an internal struggle in my mind that, I was, I get a bit stuck with is that - and obviously there's no kind of real guidance around this, but you know, if you think about equal opportunities - in an</p>	<p><u>sense that this is rewarding for Jennifer.</u></p> <p>Parental anxiety can be challenging</p> <p>Handling misconceptions around RSE</p> <p><u>Influence of own morals?</u></p> <p>Mixed experienced with parents</p> <p>Holding parental anxiety</p> <p>Managing misunderstandings about RSE</p> <p>Reassurance to parents</p> <p><u>Internal struggle - managing ethical dilemmas without guidance.</u></p>
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<p>Recognition of the complexities around cognitive and physical age - balancing age-appropriate content with the rights of teenage learners. Je9</p> <p>Support staff navigate societal shifts while adapting to the new RSE curriculum. Je9</p> <p>Addressing anxiety and advocating for RSE. Je9</p>	<p>ideal world all of our pupils would have the same information, just provided in a slightly different way, but I just, I mean I've worked on this for such a long time and I just feel there's no way of providing that information in in a different way, really, it's just not, you know, you wouldn't sit down a 2 year old and talk to them about sexual intercourse because it's just not <u>relevant</u> and – But, but it's a tricky part of it, because obviously I'm aware that a lot of the pupils we have here <u>are</u> teenagers and, you know, have as much of a right to having those feelings and those desires as anyone else. So that's always a bit of a struggle in my mind.</p> <p>Martha: Hmm. And do you think other sort of staff in the school have similar struggles?</p> <p>Jennifer: I think, staff in the school have - we have a lot of support staff here because of the high needs of the pupils, so most classes have between 5 to 6 staff in a class of like 8 to 9 pupils and a lot of our support staff have worked here for a very long time and are very, kind of, I guess used to the way things are and then so when this new curriculum was introduced, there was quite a lot of anxiety from support staff just about like these things being taught to our pupils. So I've had to do quite a lot of work with them as well around like reassuring them about like <u>justifying</u> and explaining <u>why</u> we're teaching these things. So kind of almost similar anxieties to parents in a way, which has been quite interesting, but they're much, I think now, because we've been running now for like a couple of years and much more on board with it and understand <u>why</u> we need to teach this stuff but it can still be a struggle just to get staff to say, like,</p>	<p>Complexities around cognitive and physical age</p> <p>Recognising learners rights – <u>focus on ethics again</u> <i>A struggle</i></p> <p>High staff to student ratio</p> <p><i>Anxiety</i> from staff around RSE curriculum – <u>fear around teaching RSE topics.</u> Reassuring again but this time staff. Interesting as it contradicts pupils enjoyment of the subject. <i>Justifying</i> – <u>sense of a battle</u> Time has allowed anxieties to settle.</p> <p>Importance of staff acceptance in effectively implementing the curriculum – <u>needing to get everyone on board.</u></p>
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<p>Staff hesitancy reflects challenges of broader societal discomfort with discussing sensitive topics. Je10</p> <p>The pandemic period served as a catalyst for Jennifer's focus on developing the new curriculum. Je10</p> <p>Transitioning to the new curriculum revealed a previous lack of consistency and clarity in RSE delivery. Je10</p> <p>Trust in staff-student relationships facilitated a smooth transition to the new curriculum. Je10</p>	<p>the correct scientific vocabulary for body parts, for example, out loud. And things like that can be, can be challenging.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, it sounds like - so did your school go through quite a big change then when the new curriculum or the new guidance came out?</p> <p>Jennifer: I guess it's hard for me to fully comment on that because I pretty much started teaching here and was put as the leader of the subject group and then, kind of, then it was COVID. So I basically spent a lot of the pandemic working on this new curriculum and then kind of introduced it. As far as I could see there wasn't, there were sessions going on, but I don't think consistently across the board it was more like some pupils were having access to a bit of RSHE but it was a bit random and there wasn't really like a clear progression and there weren't clear learning objectives, so I guess there probably was quite a big change for people.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. And do you think the, how do you think the students responded to that? Like when you first started doing the curriculum?</p> <p>Jennifer: I think they, I mean our pupils here are very, very trusting of us and I think they kind of just went with it to be honest, like I didn't really feel a huge like resistance from them. They're much, I mean, that's the other thing about our pupils here, you know, even like our formal learners. When I first introduced like we're gonna be talking today about sexual intercourse, for example, and I said, like, you know, if you need to have a laugh about it, that's fine. It might make you feel a bit embarrassed, might make you feel a bit like</p>	<p><i>Challenging</i></p> <p>Introduction of new curriculum was quite a <i>big change</i> – previous lack of consistency <i>Clear</i> mentioned twice – <u>lack of clarity, confusing?</u></p> <p>Sense of trust in staff-student relationships. <i>Resistance</i> – from adults but not students</p> <p>Normalising, accepting emotions.</p>
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<p>While adults expressed some resistance, students were open and accepting of RSE, emphasising the value of neurodivergent thinking. Je11</p> <p>Sessions with neurodiverse students are consistently intriguing, offering unique insights and perspectives that challenge expectations. Je11</p> <p>RSE can lead to transformative realisations for students about their own sexuality. Je11</p> <p>Teaching contributes to students' self-understanding and sense of clarity. Je11</p>	<p>funny and all these things and they just looked at me like I was completely mad. They just thought it was very, they don't have the same (<i>laughs</i>) social inhibitions that we might have which is a really good thing and like, takes it away from being a big barrier to the education cause they just, they just want to know the information, really, they don't really find it embarrassing or strange, they're just very open.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, yeah, definitely. Ans are there any sort of, any sort of experiences with them that really kind of stand out to you, like any interactions that you had?</p> <p>Jennifer: I think, yeah, I think most I mean most sessions with them are very, are very interesting. I think the way they, I mean obviously like the way their brains work is very, very unique and different. So things that they come out with in those sessions are often different from what I predict they're gonna come out with, which is always interesting. But yeah, I mean we have had pupils - I think I can share this because it's anonymous, right?</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, as long as no names or anything like that. Yeah, as long as like without names and stuff, that's fine.</p> <p>Jennifer: Yeah, exactly. We have had pupils coming out, for example, following sessions and that's been a really, you know, big thing for those pupils and they, those pupils have referred directly to stuff they've learned in sessions and kind of said it's made, like you know, it's made them understand themselves more fully and kind of has made lots of things make sense in their in their head. So yeah, that's been quite a big deal for those pupils and, yeah I guess just, it's just the</p>	<p>Neurodivergence. – <i>a good thing.</i></p> <p><i>Social inhibitions as a barrier to education.</i></p> <p><u>Breaking assumptions.</u></p> <p><i>Interesting – used a lot</i></p> <p><i>Unique and different – <u>Beauty of neurodivergence.</u> Also very very - <u>repetition emphasises sense of admiration or intrigue</u></i></p> <p><u>Expectation vs reality</u></p> <p><u>Sense that Jennifer is ethically minded</u></p> <p>Pupils have learned about their own sexuality in RSE</p> <p>Supporting students to understand selves</p>
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<p>Ethical dilemmas arising from the disparity between empowering students with knowledge while acknowledging the practical barriers they face. Je12</p> <p>Careful management of student relationships to prioritise safety and well-being. Je12</p> <p>Acknowledging the challenges of bridging the gap between taught knowledge and students' realities. Je12</p>	<p>way they take in the information is always interesting and you can kind of see them making realisations as you teach them stuff. I think another really hard part though, about this curriculum for learners with special needs, is that you're teaching them about all of these things, and they have a <u>right</u> to, you know, <u>engage</u> in these things. But the reality is still very different because, you know, so, so many of them lack really <u>any</u> independence. You know, are you always having the back of your mind, like, where are you gonna form these relationships? and what's that actually gonna look like for <u>you</u> as a young person?</p> <p>Martha: And do to any of their children in your school have relationships that you're like aware of?</p> <p>Jennifer: Sorry, say that again.</p> <p>Martha: Do any of the children in your school have relationships that you're aware of?</p> <p>Jennifer: We have had a couple of pupils kind of interested in each other in that way in the past and that's had to be managed quite <u>carefully</u>, just in terms of, sort of keeping everyone safe. There's never been like a kind of double sided consensual relationship as far as I'm aware of within the school, but there has been there's, there was an incident a few years ago of like a pupil kissing another pupil and we had to kind of investigate that and then give them some kind of bespoke individual intervention around like, around that really and teach them about like their feelings and appropriate places and things like that. So it's, it's so complex because if I was a mainstream teacher, I'd just</p>	<p><i>Big deal, see them making realisations – <u>lessons having a visible impact on students lives – transformative?</u></i> <i>Interesting again.</i></p> <p>Human rights – yet systemic barriers. Acknowledge reality of challenges. <u>Ethical and practical dilemmas?</u> <u>Discrepancy between teaching and students lived experiences</u></p> <p><i>Managed carefully – ensuring the safety and wellbeing of students.</i></p> <p>complexities in developing relationships – <u>dilemmas around wanting to support this yet complex</u></p>
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<p>Balancing the desire to support students' social development with the unique challenges they face. Je13</p>	<p>know that my pupils would be going home and probably texting each other and meeting up and going on dates and stuff. Our people's won't really <u>ever</u> do that, necessarily, which is kind of hard.</p>	<p>Gap between teaching and students realities is <i>kind of hard</i> – <u>acknowledging and empathising with students the challenges students experience.</u></p>
<p>Adaptation of teaching methods to accommodate diverse situations. Je13</p>	<p>Martha: And so when you have those, I know you spoke about a couple of sort of individual cases where things have kind of come up, so do you provide sort of individual support with certain things and how does that kind of come into place?</p>	
<p>Recognising the complexity of RSE issues and providing targeted support. Je13</p>	<p>Jennifer: Yeah, so we've done quite a few like, over the years I've been here anyway, I've kind of planned and delivered a few like specific interventions for pupils around specific areas, link linked to RSHE, so I've done like period workshops, for example, with some of our girls and yeah, I mean, they all just are very individualised depending on the situation that the pupil is in. I had a pupil a few years ago who was 16 years old and he was very interested in a pupil who was 13 years old, so I had to do some kind of 1:1 sessions with him around, like <u>consent</u> and understanding kind of the issues with <u>age</u> and yeah, yeah, very individualised to the situation, really.</p>	<p>Different teaching format – individualised support Examples of <i>specific</i> interventions – <u>language emphasises highly individualised approach</u> Consideration of broader contexts i.e. consent and legal frameworks – highly complex nature of RSE</p>
<p>Acknowledgment of systemic challenges in delivering comprehensive support. Je13</p>	<p>Martha: And does that happen quite commonly and like is it generally you who would do that sort of support?</p> <p>Jennifer: It's something that I would like to do more of, obviously with time wise, it's just that's our biggest barrier as teachers. I think like, yeah, it's definitely something I'd love to do more of but the time constraints unfortunately prevent it from being a kind of, something that happens <u>all the time</u></p>	<p>Time as a barrier – <u>ideal vs reality. Systemic challenges.</u></p>

<p>Desire for more specific guidance to navigate complex issues in special schools. Je14 Feeling of uncertainty and ambivalence due to lack of clear direction. Je14 Constant second-guessing and worry about making the right decisions. Je14 Seeking validation and reassurance through clearer guidance and rules. Je14</p>	<p>and just in terms of like my workload, but also the hours of the school day.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, absolutely. And just I'm aware of your time as well actually, but in terms of like avenues for the future. I know that it sounds like you have some dilemmas and some like personal dilemmas, professional dilemmas around RSE and everything. And what would you kind of like to see in the future?</p> <p>Jennifer: Do you mean like from the government or from just in general kind of with the teaching?</p> <p>Martha: Anything, anything, really, like from outside professionals, within your school, from the government, like anything that you think would help really with some of those dilemmas?</p> <p>Jennifer: More guidance I guess would be really useful, I mean, I do feel like we're in a little bit of a like black hole in special schools in terms of like, what information we get. And in a way I love that about the job because it gives you a lot of freedom and it means that you can kind of make professional decisions yourself and, but then you're also always constantly second guessing yourself and worrying like is this - am I definitely doing the right thing? So I guess more guidance around like, you know, what is believed to be the right thing for learners of different abilities rather than this kind of very broad guidance which was given. Kind of validation of what we're doing and, because it feels very much like we're on our own path and doing our own thing and it feels like we're doing the right stuff, but it's kind of</p>	<p>Need for more specific guidance</p> <p><i>Black hole – <u>black hole of nothingness? Uncertainty?</u></i></p> <p>Ambivalence</p> <p>Worrying about doing the wrong thing</p> <p><i>Validation – need for direction</i></p> <p><i>Scary not having guidance</i></p>
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<p>Efforts to collaborate with other schools to address common challenges. Je15 Overwhelmed by the multitude of complex issues. Je15</p> <p>Recognition of inconsistencies arising from subjective interpretations. Je15</p> <p>Reflection on the unconventional nature of decision-making in the absence of guidance. Je15</p>	<p>scary because you're doing it without much guidance. And I have tried to set up like RSHE essentially working parties in the past with other special schools because, like there are <u>so many</u> just complex things that come up, like I had a I had a big thing about a year ago around like masturbation, where I was trying to work out what our policy should be on masturbation? Because we didn't have a policy and it was, parents were getting different information from different teachers depending on the teacher's own kind of views around it and it just seemed very inconsistent. So I wrote a policy for the school which we're quite pleased with, and I think it is very clear, but it's kind of mad that I basically had <u>nothing</u> to base it on. I just had, I basically just spoke to other special schools. Most of them didn't have, none of them had policies, in fact. I spoke to a kind of sex and relationships <u>expert</u> from the borough who gave me some, advice, but again it's all very like it just feels like very opinion- everyone's just got their <u>opinions</u> on it. It's not, it would be really nice to just be like this is the rule within a school.</p> <p>Martha: And it's quite different really in that way to the rest of the curriculum, isn't it, that you know, a lot of the other parts of the curriculum are quite straight and standard, I guess less so in in special schools though, and I guess maybe it's part of the curriculum where you'd hope to see more guidance, but in fact there is less? <i>(laughs)</i></p> <p>Jennifer: Yeah. And I think also like an issue with a lot of the guidance that comes from the government is that it's guidance for special schools, but they're kind of talking more about like schools for pupils with moderate learning</p>	<p>Working across institutions <i>So many complex things – <u>sense of being overwhelmed with variety of issues</u></i></p> <p>Subjectivity creating inconsistencies</p> <p>Taking a proactive approach – sense of pride <i>Kind of mad</i> <i>Nothing to base it on – <u>ad hoc approaches</u></i></p> <p>Based on opinions – subjective. <u>Seeking a level of objectivity.</u></p>
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<p>Students are overlooked and forgotten by educational policy. Je16</p> <p>Caught in a paradoxical scenario. Je16</p> <p>Isolated in the struggle to navigate RSE without specialised support networks. Je16</p>	<p>difficulties rather, and it's almost like pupils with severe learning difficulties are kind of just like forgotten, which is crazy because actually they're probably the pupils who need this the most in terms of like what we know about their vulnerabilities and stuff. So it's kind of frustrating, because yeah, it sort of feels like, even when Ofsted came here a few years ago, they were like <u>amazed</u> that we were teaching them some of the stuff we were teaching (<i>laughs</i>) and I was kind of like, well, <u>obviously</u>, I mean, yes? This is because of the <u>guidance</u>? But, yeah, like more bespoke guidance for pupils, like for pupils with PMLD needs, like for people with severe learning difficulties, it would be incredible.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. And it sounds like sort of the support network, something you've kind of spoken about, like obviously you've gone out of your own way to contact other schools and stuff, and is that like something that you'd like to see more of? And how would that look?</p> <p>Jennifer: Yeah, I mean I think that would be really helpful and I have, you know, I have been put on like training sessions around RSHE, but again I often find that most of the people on the session, in the sessions are either like mainstream teachers or mainstream teachers working in a unit, so their pupils have much better understanding, but yeah, kind of having like borough wide groups where you could just come with questions and things that have come up and just discuss things would be so cool, because I just get the feeling that all of us special needs schools are kind of just reinventing the wheel every day and we don't really need to be, but there's kind of no centralised way of sorting it out at the moment.</p>	<p><i>Forgotten / crazy – <u>questioning the inclusivity of policy/guidance</u></i></p> <p><i>Frustrating</i></p> <p>Ofsted shocked that guidance had been put into place – <u>disconnect between schools and policy makers</u></p> <p>Need for more training and support</p> <p><u>Isolating experience</u></p> <p>Lack of centralised resources – <u>creating unnecessary workload</u></p>
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<p>Collaborating with SLT helps to refine and adapt RSE practice, providing a sense of guidance. Je17</p> <p>Holding a barrage of unanswered questions. Je17</p> <p>The weight of continuous problem-solving. Je17</p>	<p>Martha: Yeah. No, I think that's a really interesting point. And obviously collaboration is really important. And where do you get like, in your school now, do you have sort of support that you can get from like other members of staff or anything like that?</p> <p>Jennifer: Yeah, and it's and it's always useful to talk things through with people. So when we were adapting the so safe programme for [school name], in the group that I work in there are two other teachers who I work with and there's a member of SLT also within the group who sort of guides us, I guess. And like when we were doing the so safe stuff they were just constantly, when we were trying to kind of finalise it, we kept coming up with like questions and issues and it was just really useful to talk things through because if you're trying to do it all in your own head it just gets very confusing. You kind of need to be like, can we put this here? Does that make sense? Is there gonna be an issue with that? Because obviously you don't wanna make a whole load of resources and then realise something doesn't quite work? But there are always going to be, I feel like with this subject in particular, always going to be things that <u>come up</u> that are <u>barriers</u> or things that people haven't <u>thought about</u> that you then have to rethink. Like just to give you an example, with this so safe program, so we teach them 'other person I don't know' which is essentially what used to be a stranger. You don't do, you can't do <u>anything</u> with them. So it says nothing. So there's this 'other person I don't know' – nothing, which we kind of started rolling out and teaching and we've got an on-site cafe here which is open to the public, and one of my pupils was working in the cafe and a person she didn't know</p>	<p>Importance of collaboration and discussion with colleagues</p> <p>Support from above. <i>Guides us – <u>SLT filling that gap?</u></i></p> <p>Complexity of topic can be confusing</p> <p>Importance of working together <i>Lots of questions – <u>sense of feeling overwhelmed?</u></i></p> <p>Never ending barriers - <u>RSE as an ongoing process. Difficulty of having to anticipate challenges.</u></p>
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<p>Facing unexpected challenges - revisiting the drawing board. Je18</p>	<p>came into the cafe and ordered and she just refused to speak to him. And I said “Why are you? Why are you not speaking?” And she was like, “Because it's a person I don't know.” And I was like “Oh my gosh. Yeah, of course. Like, you're totally right”, so then I'm kind of like, right, go back to the drawing board, look at it again. How do we? How do we adapt this to make it work in <u>this</u> situation? You know, it's like, it's really, you really have to think about everything.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, I think it goes into like what you're saying about how all these children have such a unique way of thinking as well. And, and especially with those individuals with autism as well, like those sorts of literal thinking as well, when you've got something like that, where it's like ‘no one’, it's quite, it's quite black and white, so almost trying to get into their way of thinking, I can imagine, must be quite challenging.</p> <p>Jennifer: Yeah, definitely (<i>laughs</i>).</p> <p>Martha: Have you had any other experiences around that?</p> <p>Jennifer: Yeah, there are, there have definitely been things around that, that have happened before where like - and it's, it's really thinking about like the terminology you use cause we used to use the term ‘safer stranger’ and ‘stranger’ here. So we teach them like ‘stranger’ is someone you don't know <u>at all</u>. A ‘safer stranger’ is someone you don't know, but they work in a shop or they work at - they're a bus driver or a policeman. So kind of a community worker. So they're safe, but then obviously that brings with it a whole load of other issues because we know that unfortunately <u>not</u> all of those</p>	<p>Needing to continuously adapt teaching</p> <p><i>Back to the drawing board – <u>facing challenges and setbacks</u></i> Heavy on the problem solving</p> <p>Challenges of finding appropriate terminology – <u>trying to anticipate every possible scenario.</u></p>
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<p>Mindful of the students vulnerability in the context of the current climate. Je19</p> <p>Challenge in translating complex and abstract concepts into a structured and concrete form. Je19</p> <p>A strong passion for RSE. Je19</p> <p>Safety should be a primary concern. Je19</p> <p>Facing battles alone is overwhelming and daunting. Je19</p>	<p>people are actually safe, obviously, hopefully most of them are, but they're not <u>all</u>. And, you know, you've got kids watching like the news and seeing about Sarah Everard or, I don't know another another situation similar to that, and they're like 'but that's the police officer, they're a safer stranger?' So you're so then you're like, right, 'safer stranger' doesn't work anymore because, and I guess because the way a lot of them think is <u>so black and white</u> you kind of have to cater to that, through this, through this teaching and it's, that's what's so challenging because it's just obviously relationships aren't black and white.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, it's very dynamic. That's really interesting actually. And so we just, I know you have to run off, but is there anything that we kind of haven't covered that you feel like would be really important to cover?</p> <p>Jennifer: I guess, I mean, I just feel very passionately about this curriculum and about this teaching and kind of see it as like, you know, 60% of what I do here every day because as far as I'm concerned, like, yeah, it's great if they've got their literacy, it's great if they've got their numeracy, but are they safe? That's, surely that has to come as like the primary, <u>primary</u> thing and, yeah I guess I'd just like there to be more people who are as fired up as I am (<i>laughs</i>), I mean, I'm sure there are, but I just feel a bit like alone in it though, and having to make all these <u>decisions</u> and come up with all these <u>ideas</u> for a whole school, it can be quite overwhelming and daunting. So yeah, like I said before, I guess just like definitely in an ideal world, we'd have more guidance, we'd have more like expertise. Because, the reality is I'm not an expert on this, I'm just doing the best I can with the</p>	<p>Current climate – <u>realising that the complexities of life do not fit neatly within a curriculum</u></p> <p><i>Black and white</i></p> <p>Relationships are complex and abstract – <u>almost opposite to students thinking?</u></p> <p>Strong passion for RSE</p> <p>Preparing for adulthood – <u>RSE are a core subject</u></p> <p><i>Fired up – <u>sense of a battle</u></i> <i>Alone - <u>isolating experience</u></i> <i>Heavy load to carry – <u>overwhelming and daunting</u></i></p> <p>Need for guidance and expertise</p>
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<p>RSE is inescapable. Je21</p> <p>Advocating for students rights. Je21</p> <p>Saddened by gaps in education, driven to improve outcomes. Je21</p> <p>Getting RSE right means that students will be safer. Je21</p>	<p>things that come up that are <u>good</u> about relationships or negatives and it's just something you see, like any classroom you walk into it's, relationship stuff is going on obviously. I feel very passionately that people with special needs <u>should have</u> equal opportunities and access to all of this information and should be able to have relationships, sexual relationships, if that's what they want, when they become adults. And like it really saddens me that the reality is that a lot of people (<i>pause</i>) don't, because they either haven't had the correct education or yeah, just, I guess just don't know how because they haven't been taught that. So yeah, I guess I just feel very, I just feel passionately about the young people themselves and I want the kind of best possible outcome in life for them and, you know, I've read a lot about the sort of the vulnerability that they have and the, kind of, <u>horrible</u> things that can happen as a result of that, so this just feels like such an important thing to get right.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, absolutely. Yeah, absolutely. And it's really, really inspiring to hear you talk about it as well, and I think you've given me quite a lot of, like, really interesting points actually there as well. I'll stop the recording now because I know you've got -</p>	<p><u>RSE is unavoidable</u></p> <p>Ethical responsibility – <u>advocating for students rights</u></p> <p>Emotional investment in role</p> <p>Reality of CYPs vulnerability Emphasis on the importance of <i>getting it right</i></p>
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Janice's Interview

Experiential statements	Transcript	Exploratory notes (Descriptive, <i>linguistic</i> , conceptual)
<p>RSE previously integrated within PSHE curriculum. Ja1</p> <p>Concern about how to deliver RSE explicitly to varying abilities amid new guidance. Ja1</p> <p>Following guidance that doesn't give any guidance. Ja1</p>	<p>Martha: All right. So please tell me about your experience of delivering RSE for children and young people with learning difficulties?</p> <p>Janice: OK, so the school that I was at actually already delivered a form of RSE prior to this guidance coming in, but it was integrated into PSHE and sort of a personal development curriculum. And it was delivered for a specific scheme of work, which was called the Navigator curriculum, and it was split into sort of different units. It was almost similar to sort of like a scout-esque badge system in a way. So you had, like, healthy living, money and finance, and when they've done each unit, they got like a certificate, etcetera. And within that were topics that would be classed as RSE. Obviously, when the new guidance came in, then, there was a lot of concern about: one, could they carry that curriculum on? Would it meet the guidance? And two, what the explicit instruction looked like for learners, especially learners that were sensory based and nonverbal students. With the students that were slightly more cognitively able it wasn't as much of a concern. You can pretty much teach to the guidance as you do with other subjects, but it was sort of very much felt by sort of the standard classroom teachers, like myself, and our head of department that actually that guidance didn't give any guidance (<i>laughs</i>) on what to do with our sort of learners. So, we were sort of floundering for a bit I'll be honest. You know, there was a lot of pressure that, you know, from that set date you've got to start</p>	<p>RSE previously implicit within PSHE curriculum.</p> <p><u>Almost hidden within a bigger subject?</u></p> <p>New guidance created concern across various levels – <u>some anxiety around RSE being explicit.</u></p> <p>More concerning for less cognitively able learners</p> <p><i>The guidance didn't give any guidance</i></p> <p><i>Floundering under pressure</i></p>

<p>Holding unanswered questions. Ja2</p> <p>Start with what you know. Ja2</p> <p>Start with what you know. Ja2</p> <p>Inherent challenges in teaching students about abstract topics. Ja2</p> <p>Personal reflections on the complexity of understanding relationships as a neurodivergent individual. Ja2</p> <p>Concerned about remaining sensitive to students diversity. Ja2</p>	<p>delivering these RSE lessons. But we were like, right, what does that actually mean, though? How, you know, we've got this hour blocked on the timetable, but OK, what am I going to do for that hour? So to start with, we started taking those RSE elements out of that previous curriculum. That scheme of work that we've been using, which was a sensory based thing based around activity, sort of like a what's in the bucket style attention autism thing, with like a key object. It incorporated the NSPC pants scheme. I'm not sure if you know that?</p> <p>Martha: No, I don't?</p> <p>Jennifer : It's like a pants acronym, the word PANTS, and then it's about like your private areas, not letting other people have access, etcetera for special needs children. So we tried to tie those in with it. The relationship path is particularly difficult for students with ASD or who are on the spectrum because obviously an inherent difficulty for them is relationships and understanding relationships and how they can be perceived, etcetera. And this was something I was quite apprehensive about delivering myself, being autistic myself as a teacher, and because I can discuss sort of relationships on paper, you know, this is a platonic relationship, this is a romantic relationship. But actually my personal experience may be different from sort of what is expected to be taught, so to speak. There was also a lot of concern around the teaching of the family types, so your nuclear family, extended family, etcetera because a lot of our pupils either are in care or are estranged from family members. A couple of our pupils are not actually in care, but either live in respite or spend a large proportion of their time</p>	<p><u>Lots of unanswered questions</u></p> <p>Drawing upon previous teaching/resources – <u>start with what you know</u></p> <p><u>Inherent challenges</u></p> <p>Personal connection to students experience Personal reflections on the complexity of understanding relationships as a neurodivergent individual. <i>Concern again.</i> Sensitive of students individual contexts – <u>worry around covering sensitive topics?</u></p>
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<p>Initial panic and concern amidst limited guidance. Ja3</p> <p>Lucky to have access to even generic support. Ja3</p> <p>Seeking external reassurance. Ja3</p> <p>Even experts not having clear answers. Ja3</p> <p>Stress and worry about Ofsted's perspective. Ja3</p> <p>Left with lingering uncertainty despite external validation. Ja3</p>	<p>under the care of carers, as opposed to in the family home because their needs are so severe. And so again there was a lot of concern about how to deliver that sensitively. So anyway, after a sort of a first few months of sort of initial panic and what are we going to do, we sort of wrote our own curriculum based on the guidance and taking these elements from the previous scheme. We were lucky enough that we had, there was an advisor on our local authority, so we sort of submitted that curriculum then to the local authority. They weren't trained in special education, they were just a generic advisor brought in to make sure all the schools in the LA met this guidance. And so again, they didn't have particular sort of input to give us on teaching our type of students. But at the very least, they could look over it as an external person and kick off where we were meeting the guidance from a statutory point of view, which was was you know, reassuring. And they said as far as they could see, they were happy. We were meeting all the different, you know, criterion. And they basically said to us 'crack on, do what you think is best. You know the kids best. Sort of do what you want and hope for the best if Ofsted come in and we'll see what comes from it.' And we were in the Ofsted window at the time, so obviously that was a bit of a concern for us was, if they come in and they're like, 'what on earth are you doing?' Turned out they came and after I left, so I did avoid that particular stress. But I did read the Ofsted report and it was highlighted in the Ofsted report for that school, that they were happy with their personal social, emotional development education that included the implementation of the new RSE framework. So, I take from that, that it was OK? <i>(laughs)</i></p>	<p><i>Concern</i> <u>Initial panic – sense of chaos and concern in the absence of clear direction?</u> <i>Lucky to have support – even if not specialised</i></p> <p><u>Expert able to provide a sense of validation? Reassuring</u> <i>They were happy</i></p> <p><i>Hope for the best if Ofsted come in – even the experts don't have answers</i> <i>Concern again.</i></p> <p><i>Stress – worries about doing the wrong thing</i> <i>Ofsted were happy</i></p> <p><u>External bodies providing a sense of validation, yet a sense of lingering uncertainty?</u></p>
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<p>Using familiar interests to support students engagement. Ja4</p> <p>Finding creative ways to link complex topics with students interests and existing knowledge. Ja4</p> <p>Nice to find avenues to teach students about difference. Ja4</p>	<p>Martha: Aw, that's some nice feedback then (<i>laughs</i>). And so how, so you obviously built up that curriculum then based on that, and then how did that actually look when it started coming into place, when you were actually delivering that in practice?</p> <p>Janice: OK. So we stayed with the sensory element and with the initial sort of book, so to speak. So we tried to plan each sort of section around two or three lessons, which usually varied from fifteen to half an hour-minute delivery input based around like a – ah words just gone out of my head – like an eye-catching object? So with the PANTS one, it was a pair of pants. With the relationship things, we we did one based around some teddy bears and we had, like, a mommy teddy bear, daddy teddy bear, etcetera. We tried to tie it in where possible to things like familiar traditional tales or familiar interests of the children. So we used Peppa Pig a lot. <u>Big</u> interest of the children and they've got a nuclear family of, you know, daddy pig, mummy pig, George and Peppa. But they've also got the extended family, and that was quite useful as well for doing, sort of like, looking at differences because the extended family aren't pigs, they're <u>other</u> animals. But it was quite nice to link to, you know, not all humans look the same, go on to talking about then skin colour etcetera, etcetera. But comparing it to, "well they're pigs, but the family members a rabbit", or whatever it is. I can't remember off the top of my head what they all were. So we found that really useful and also for people engagement obviously using things that they're interested in is key. We found, actually getting in the sort of – What do they call it? I can't remember what it's called in the guidance, but there's like the key vocabulary – It's not technically</p>	<p>Keeping students engaged</p> <p>Relating teaching to students interests and existing knowledge</p> <p><i>Nice</i> to teach students about difference</p>
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<p>Not always possible to implement RSE guidance verbatim. Ja5</p> <p>Guidance lacking meaning for students. Ja5</p> <p>Complex/abstract topics becoming lost in translation. Ja5</p> <p>Pressure to provide physical evidence. Ja5</p> <p>A need for proof. Ja5</p>	<p>statutory, I don't think, but it's within the guidance that the certain words should be taught or used. Sometimes, obviously for us, that just wasn't possible. There were too long of words or words that didn't have any actual meaning to our students. Also teaching in sign language some of the time means the translation, etcetera could be different. It was quite difficult to symbolise some of the words as well, so we used a lot of PECS or widget symbols. You could come up with a picture-ish, but it it wasn't, like you know, the best representation. But, it did the job. So there were, there were times where although we were delivering a set lesson based around, you know, the type of family. It would sort of segment off into – almost felt like you were spending more of the lesson trying to get to the point you were making than making it, because it was lost between sort of translation or explanation with the children. I don't know if I describe that well. I hope that's OK?</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, I get what you mean. Don't worry, that's fine.</p> <p>Janice: And then we did that for a whole term, so like two half terms. Still loosely based on that previous curriculum. And then we sort of do like an internal review within school. For the mainstream part of school as well, and they were keen for us to try and get a little bit more sort of <u>evidence</u> of learning and obviously not writing, our students aren't capable of writing, but a bit more sort of, yeah, evidence. Physical sort of, you know, that it had actually been happening because, you know, I suppose we could just have said we were doing it and we weren't -cause it's very talk based. So, we did start looking at some very simple, sort of like Velcro matching worksheets for some things and then</p>	<p>Not possible to implement the guidance verbatim</p> <p><u>Difficult to relate guidance to experience</u> <i>it did the job</i></p> <p><u>lost in translation/explanation – guidance topics too abstract for some students?</u></p> <p>Needing to <i>evidence</i> RSE – justifying/proving</p> <p><u>Lacking trust from above</u> Adapting teaching to provide evidence</p>
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<p>Adapting teaching to provide evidence. Ja6</p> <p>Disparity between students understanding and complexity of RSE topics. Ja6</p> <p>Complexity of RSE topics can be lost on students if taken at face value. Ja6</p> <p>Making complex topics accessible. Ja6</p> <p>RSE is fun and enjoyable when made accessible. Ja6</p> <p>Balancing accessibility with evidence. Ja6</p>	<p>taking pictures of any activities we did. So when we were looking at sort of grooming type relationships and sort of coming towards what would be classed as child sexual exploitation, obviously our students didn't have the cognitive understanding to really understand what that is, but we could go with the very basic level of, you know if Miss XX, your teacher, keeps asking you to punch another student, but she's giving you chocolate every time, just because she's giving you chocolate every time doesn't mean it's then OK to carry on punching somebody else. So we did sort of like role play around – that was an example scenario, for example. Obviously not explicitly there referencing sort of sexualised behaviour, because it would have been lost on our students. But trying to get that point across of, you know, the <u>power</u> imbalance, and that just because you're getting sort of a reward or something nice out of that relationship doesn't mean that it's OK to do something that's not OK or makes you feel uncomfortable. So yeah, we did a lot of role play like that, got a lot of things like trying to get the children to, like, pretend to have a fight with Miss XX and then they'd get a reward from the other TA. And it was like ohh, but was it OK that Miss XX's now on the floor crying – I was fine – just like it was an example, which they obviously loved (<i>laughs</i>). They thought that was great because, you know, they thought that actually <u>really</u> hurt me and that was <u>brilliant</u>. But we did a lot of stuff like that when we moved to sort of getting this evidence because someone else in the room could take a picture of that role play then, and it could be stuck in a book as sort of a <u>evidence</u>. Sort of the Velcro work things I said, what else? Ah, and then we tried to do or we did a bit of online stuff then. So we used Google Classroom and Satchel one, which are like online</p>	<p>Making complex topics accessible</p> <p>Complexity of RSE topics can be too much when taken at face value</p> <p><i>Loved, brilliant</i> – making RSE fun and enjoyable</p> <p>Emphasis on evidence – <u>not only having to think about making RSE accessible but additionally evidencable</u></p>
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<p>Providing evidence becoming primary focus. Ja7</p> <p>Systemic panic around accountability having a detrimental impact on students learning. Ja7</p> <p>Tension between accountability and effective teaching. Ja7</p> <p>Curiosity around LAC's openness and ability to access RSE. Ja7</p>	<p>learning platforms, and they could do like drag and drop quizzes and they could the students with eye gaze could do it via eye gaze and stuff. So, there'd be like a picture of a <u>healthy</u> friendship and an <u>unhealthy</u> friendship. And they'd just put the green dot by the healthy one and red one by the unhealthy one. Very basic things like that, but again, the computer saved it once they've done it and it was just, more I think because we were in that Ofsted window, it's a bit more panic from powers that be that actually if anyone did question it, there was that bit of evidence, so to speak, which sort of changed our approach a little bit, I think, <u>potentially</u> to the detriment of the students. I think they enjoyed the sensory element more, but I understand why those in charge thought that that was, you know, necessary.</p> <p>Martha: Hmm. And you've spoken a bit about sort of student engagement and really it sounds like obviously those role plays that you were doing and stuff were quite engaging for the for the students. And how did you experience like getting the students engaged and what did that look like for you?</p> <p>Janice: What we found actually quite interesting was, sort of the students that (<i>pause</i>) may be involved in safeguarding or child protection, may be involved in local authority care, have support from our school social worker, etcetera, were a lot more <u>open</u> and a <u>lot more</u> (<i>pause</i>) willing, a lot more able to, in their own way, discuss experiences and discuss feelings around relationships, around expectations, around things. And so I think that showed actually a massive <u>gap</u> in the provision, because that's obviously come from additional work they do with people like counsellors and therapists and social services. And actually, some of the students that live a</p>	<p><u>Evidence almost becoming the key focus</u></p> <p>Impact of Ofsted – <i>panic from powers that be</i> – <u>almost having to change approaches due to authority rather than students' needs? What is the priority?</u> <i>Detrimental impact</i></p> <p>LAC more open to RSE – <i>interesting</i> – <u>a surprise for staff</u></p> <p>Realisation of a gap in support students were receiving – <u>essentially shows the positive impacts of RSE when available</u></p>
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<p>Realisation of gaps in students learning resulting from differing opportunities. Ja8</p> <p>Students who hadn't been exposed to RSE denied opportunities to develop vital skills. Ja8</p> <p>Value of appropriate resources. Ja8</p> <p>Students engagement skyrocketed once they were given the opportunity to access RSE. Ja8</p> <p>Taking the time to understand students allowed Janice to provide RSE that they loved and adored. Ja8</p>	<p>life that doesn't involve any of that external input, were almost very closed and guarded to discussing things like relationships with their parents, relationships with peers, because I think they didn't know how to. That because that explicit instruction has never been there, in those topics. So I think in that sense, actually, the guidance and the implementation of this in the curriculum is actually vital, especially for our students because all of them <u>need</u> to be able to communicate that. So once we sort of got over that hurdle, of how to use the right tools to do the talking, so we, you know, looking at like emotions, fans, specific PECS and symbols for that, that are relevant to the topic, etcetera, engagement, you know, skyrocketed because they were able to, which was a key point. Like I said then, very much with our students, it was getting into the niche of their interests. The Peppa Pig thing, like I say, was an absolute hit. Role plays and anything physical. Great. Anything where, sort of you know, we'd do a lot of scenarios where I as the teacher would do something <u>wrong</u>, and they'd have to point out what I'd done wrong because, in their heads, they absolutely love the idea that I'd made a mistake and that I'd done something wrong. Like I said, the role play where they thought they'd <u>hurt</u> me, or things like that, making them feel like they'd really contributed to the lesson they absolutely adored. So that was key for engagement, you know, there's actually no way I'd stand and deliver a PowerPoint to them. That's what, what would be the point? So, when we did then move to the things where we had to have the <u>evidence</u>, although I say worksheets they were Velcro ones, the engagement definitely slipped a little bit, like I say, because we were using, you know, 10 minutes of a 30 minute lesson to do those Velcro stick things, which</p>	<p><i>Didn't know how to – <u>sense of inequality</u></i></p> <p><i>vital that students are accessing RSE – <u>sense of human rights</u></i></p> <p>Importance of appropriate resources</p> <p><i>Engagement skyrocketed</i></p> <p><i>In their heads – <u>understanding students on a personal level</u></i></p> <p><i>Adored/loved/absolute hit – understanding students = success</i></p> <p>Back to evidence</p> <p>Engagement slipped – <u>less authentic, less helpful</u></p>
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<p>Focusing on evidence overshadows the real purpose of RSE. Ja9</p> <p>Having to counteract the negative impact of evidence focused approaches. Ja9</p> <p>Students had difficulty relating to available resources. Ja9</p> <p>Scouring the internet for appropriate resources. Ja9</p> <p>Working together to fill build a curriculum from the ground. Ja9</p>	<p>was 10 minutes less of role play or scenario based stuff. So I think that didn't <u>help</u> particularly. But we sort of tried counteract that [coughs] Oh my goodness. Sorry. We tried to counteract that, when that aspect was brought in of the evidence making, by then bringing in a lot of IT based stuff because that really interested our learners. So, like I said, a lot of the online learning platform with the drag and drop sort of quizzes. We utilised a lot of the trial blowing NSPCC videos, especially to do with the PANTS programme, because they're sort of cartoony based, which again, keeps my kids interest. We looked at things like BBC bite size, but to be honest, there there were too academically and cognitively above the needs of my learners. The videos and stuff and they're doing, not that there was particularly anything wrong with them, but they're too too advanced for my learners, and and some of them involved sort of real life like human actors, if you know what I mean, which <u>doesn't</u>, didn't, interest my students at all. Cartoons and animations? Fine. They couldn't relate to real people. It didn't have the same impact to them, so any material sort of like that were were of no use. So pretty much we stuck with the ChildLine stuff. The odd YouTube video just found from general searches on YouTube, you know, like healthy relationships, that we'd obviously watched beforehand, that was cartoon based. They were alright. Some of that was alright. And then, very lucky that we had a member of staff in school who was sort of into animation. He would animate some little Peppa Pig characters doing things, so only sort of on a PowerPoint nothing too major, but again <u>great</u> because it was that level of engagement we knew they liked it. And then we'd do things like stick puppets. Obviously, actual teddy bears and dolls in the class. Trying to think if we did</p>	<p><i>Didn't help</i> <u>Sense that focusing on evidence has a negative impact on students – teachers having to counteract this</u></p> <p>Resources helpful</p> <p>Not always appropriate</p> <p>Students have difficulty relating to 'real' individuals/actors.</p> <p><u>Having to scour the internet to find helpful tools</u></p> <p>Sense of collaboration – working together to start something from scratch. <u>Sense of building the curriculum from little-nothing.</u></p>
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<p>A unique opportunity to bring RSE to life. Ja10</p> <p>Important to cover difference in RSE. Ja10</p> <p>Remembering that you're doing your best. Ja10</p> <p>SEN students are more accepting of difference than mainstream students, due to awareness of difference within themselves. Ja10</p>	<p>anything... ah, and then was the end the sort of like a trip? Visit? Whatever you want to call it, educational experience? We did have, we were very lucky enough to have a gay couple coming to school, that was like a friend of a member of staff. Again, just trying to expose the children to (<i>pause</i>) other forms of relationships. And they were allowed to ask them sort of any questions they wanted, etcetera. I'm not, again, I'm not sure really how much it sunk in past 'oh that's a man, and that's a man.' But, I don't think regardless of what we'd have done, it would with our students, to be honest. And I do tend to find generally, having worked with mainstream students and SEN students, SEN students themselves are a lot more accepting of anything that's slightly different because they are often aware of themselves that they're perceived as being different. So, I don't think it was as much of a, sort of, <u>shock</u> visit so to speak, as it would have perhaps been in a mainstream classroom if you'd have brought in an adult gay couple, where I think you'd have probably found some students were a bit like wow what, <u>what</u> is going on here?</p> <p>Martha: So it sounds like they were quite receptive of difference then, which is really nice.</p> <p>Janice: Yeah, definitely.</p> <p>Martha: And did you did you initially plan to teach about like different, like LGBTQ relationships and that sort of thing, or was that something that happened a bit more spontaneously?</p> <p>Janice: No, it, it was planned. So we'd done a couple of lessons on sexuality, types of relationships. We sort of</p>	<p><u>Bringing RSE to life</u></p> <p><u>Value on covering equality within RSE</u></p> <p>Students relate to feeling different</p> <p>Comparison with mainstream – increased sense of acceptance within SEN settings</p>
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<p>Use of shared sensory experiences to make RSE relatable and accessible. Ja11</p> <p>Creating an inclusive learning environment promotes self-confidence and positive self-perception among students. Ja11</p> <p>Encouraging students to value themselves beyond superficial standards. Ja11</p> <p>Bringing RSE to life. Ja11</p> <p>Dissonance between lessons and students lived experience. Ja11</p>	<p>themed it around the <u>funny feeling</u>, we sort of called it, which was around sort of sexual attractiveness, sort of butterflies you might get your tummy if you're attracted to someone, if you find someone funny. We did a lot of stuff around (<i>pause</i>) not just being physically attracted to someone, you know, what other qualities do people have that makes them attractive? We used a lot of worksheets and resources off twinkle, the teaching website for that, that they had on there anyway that wasn't specifically for this RSE stuff, but they had from like nurture and stuff like that. And we looked at like, you know, if someone's really smart, funny, etcetera, it might not necessarily matter that they they only have one arm, etcetera, because <u>actually</u> it's not just about how they look. And again, for our slightly more able students who were perhaps aware of their own differences, they were <u>really</u> receptive to that because they knew, you know, we had like one girl who was like, "oh, I know I'm in a wheelchair, miss. So, maybe someone would think the same about me, cause I've still got a really nice personality." And you're like, absolutely, that's exactly the point we're trying to get across. And then we made like sensory bottles based on that, like 'butterflies in your tummy' feeling for being attracted to someone and, you know, sort of like (<i>pause</i>), obviously our students or, as far I know, none of them have got experience of having kissed anyone romantically or probably even held hands, etcetera. So we talked about maybe some of the things people might do when they then get into a relationship. But again, (<i>pause</i>) past talking about it, that element was sort of lost on them <u>because</u> they haven't got that lived experience and, you know, realistically for a lot of them they're not gonna have that any time soon</p>	<p>Sensory exploration of sexual attractiveness – <u>making RSE relatable and accessible</u></p> <p>Aiming to broaden students understanding of attraction</p> <p>RSE validating for students, supporting self-esteem</p> <p>Fostering inclusivity</p> <p>Gap between teaching and lived experience – <u>dissonance?</u></p>
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<p>Dissonance between physical and cognitive age. Finding a way to consider both. Ja12</p> <p>Struggle to align guidance with students lived experiences. Ja12</p> <p>Adapting teaching to focus on hypothetical scenarios. Ja12</p> <p>Drawing upon own lived experiences to guide approaches. Ja12</p> <p>Decision to exclude certain RSE topics based on gap between guidance and lived experience. Ja12</p>	<p>because they are not of an age <u>cognitively</u> where that would be appropriate.</p> <p>Martha: And so do you find the sort of difference there, in kind of what you should be teaching and what their lives actually look like, is that something that you've found quite hard previously?</p> <p>Janice: Absolutely. Yeah. That's really good way of putting it. Thank you. Yeah, yeah, definitely that, you know, the guidance is saying explore - I think it said in one of the model curriculum for it said - the model scheme of work, sorry - said one of the lessons was like oh, 'think about time you've been in a relationship or a situation...', you know my kids couldn't do that. They've got no idea. They had never done it or they haven't got the ability to reflect on something like that. So a lot more of our teaching had to be <u>hypothetical</u> as opposed to based on sort of facts and actual experiences of the relationship side of it. Then obviously the specific, explicit <u>sexual</u> side of the teaching, you know where, like when I was at school, we put a condom on the cucumber, etcetera, etcetera. Our link learning disability nurse would always come in in the final year and do a little talk on sort of sexual health, etcetera. And we were like, how do we link that into what we're teaching them from slightly lower down in the school from of the equivalent of Year 9 onwards? But, after a lot of discussion with, you know, senior leadership, governors, etcetera, it was decided that actually that is just <u>so far</u> removed from our kids experience, you know, it's it's just not happening. What would be the point? You're probably more likely to make them distressed by, you know, bringing in an idea to them that, you know,</p>	<p>Guidance not relevant to students lived experience</p> <p>Relating to own lived experience of RSE – <u>using own experiences to inform teaching</u></p> <p>Working together – <u>support from above. Solving unanswered problems.</u> <i>So removed from kids experience</i></p> <p><u>RSE can be <i>distressing</i> if too far removed from lived experience</u></p>
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<p>No point in covering irrelevant topics. Risk of distressing students if topics are too far removed. Ja13</p> <p>RSE has the potential to cause more harm than good. Ja13</p> <p>Not wanting students to feel abnormal. Ja13</p> <p>Knowing that there is time further down the line. Ja13</p>	<p>things like erections can happen for boys because as much as it's a natural part for most teenage boys to start experimenting, playing with themselves, having those experiences you know from sort of 13 onwards, for our children <u>that isn't happening</u>. You know, most of them are still wearing nappies, unable to control their own bladder, relying on personal care for everything, so they're not having those private moments. They're not having that time where they're experiencing things like, you know, self-pleasure. So actually even bringing it into the sort of room would probably freak them out more. Because you know, they're gonna almost be like, oh, well what's that? And then some of the slightly more (<i>pause</i>) reflective students and students with anxiety would then be thinking, well, I don't do that. Am I weird? Am I missing out? Especially some students with autism, would get quite freaked out that it hadn't happened to them or they hadn't had that experience, and then it would become a whole thing of like, why has this not happened to me? And obviously that's something we could address and talk to them about, but actually if you remove that pressure altogether by not bringing it in, then I think that helps. It also helps that our school had an attached sixth form, so we knew they'd be with us till the equivalent of 18-19. So we knew that there was that possibility <u>further down the line</u> for all those things to be addressed. So they knew about them, but at the time when they may be more cognitively at the age where it was appropriate.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. So it sounds like you're really tailoring the approaches to like the individuals. And what sort of like class sizes did you generally teach at that time?</p>	<p>Important to not generalise RSE related experiences</p> <p>Risk of <i>freaking them out</i></p> <p><i>Lots of questions</i></p> <p><i>Freaked out again</i></p> <p><u>Risk of causing more harm than good?</u></p> <p>Knowing that there is time</p>
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<p>Staff-student relationships are key. Ja14</p> <p>Tension around ability grouping students in RSE. Ja14</p> <p>Evidence and accountability overshadowing the purpose of RSE. Ja14</p> <p>Balancing the wight of RSE with fun activities. Ja14</p> <p>A need to make space for decompression. Ja14</p>	<p>Janice: Between 10 and 12 students, never more than 12.</p> <p>Martha: And how did you find adapting to all those different sort of levels of need and when you were teaching?</p> <p>Janice: I mean, I think, generally teaching SEN, it comes with a bit with experience of knowing those specific kids. You tend to be quite lucky that in a specific SEN setting you've got additional adults in the room, <u>which certainly helps</u>. It meant that, what I'd usually do is group the - so I had ten children in that class. I'd group them. There was four children that were more 'higher ability', for want of a better phrase, and the other six lower ability. The lower ability students accessed more of a sensory based approach. And they were all completely nonverbal and some non-communicative at all. Those four slightly higher ability students, some of them were able to type, with assistive technology or text to speech, so I could get a bit more of their response <u>recorded</u> out of them. So we'd maybe go for a more discussion based approach there. So what I'll do is I'd work with one group and my teaching assistants would have the other group of children doing something unrelated, you know sort of like a fun activity, because it's quite a <u>heavy</u> topic otherwise as well, and then we'd swap. So that 30 minute lesson would actually be 15 minutes of teacher input related <u>to the topic</u>, the subject, and then 15 minutes of actually sort of just playing, decompression, especially for that higher ability group. I'd always have those first, so they <u>had</u> that additional 15 minutes after with support staff to address any feelings that may have come up, you know, and occasionally, especially the one girl, she may end up in that 15 minutes, taking herself away to sensory room, or asking</p>	<p>Importance of understanding students as individuals</p> <p><u>More adults helps to tailor to each students experience?</u></p> <p>Some hesitation around labels in RSE – <u>maybe related to not wanting to deny them of rights?</u></p> <p><u>Recorded – back to concerns about evidence again</u></p> <p><i>Heavy topic – balancing weight of subject with fun activities</i></p> <p><i>Decompression</i></p> <p>Providing emotional, almost therapeutic, support</p>
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<p>Staff providing emotional, almost therapeutic, support for students. Ja15</p> <p>Holding difficult emotions. Ja15</p> <p>Prioritising the emotional well-being of students by incorporating buffer time between lessons. Ja15</p> <p>Sudden switch from emotionally heavy subject to academic, unemotional topics. Ja15</p> <p>Knowing your students and prioritising their needs and wellbeing. Ja15</p>	<p>to speak to a specific member of staff, because a few of the things may have brought up feelings for her and difficult emotions. So, I found for me personally, it's really important to do it that way round with the two groups. Because it gave that sort of buffer and barrier time for the slightly higher ability students, before we then, obviously you know in a school, next you know you're suddenly then having to teach maths after and you're like, well, hang on a minute, we've just been talking about like sex and we're now on to like numbers to ten. It gave her that bit of time of just like ohh, that that was my feelings about that, we can talk about that, park that there, deal with that, become regulated again, and now I'm OK to then come in and do maths.</p> <p>Martha: And so you've talked about some sort of, lots of feelings I guess, coming up in those lessons for maybe your slightly higher able students. And how did you kind of, yeah obviously you said about that that girl taking herself off to have that time, and how did you kind of manage all those different feelings in those lessons?</p> <p>Janice: You know, sort of before we even started teaching, we'd sort of marked her and one of the other boys in that slightly higher group as children that very much wear the hearts on their sleeves and are emotionally affected by pretty much <u>anything</u> that we could talk about if they could link it to their own lives, especially. And, interestingly, the students with more issues around their own self-esteem tend to find it more difficult to talk about those things, which I suppose you know is natural and understandable. So, like I said, the specific planning of teaching that group first and making that decompression provision available after was</p>	<p>Difficult emotions</p> <p><u>Needing time for containment of feelings?</u></p> <p>Switching between potentially challenging topics and typical teaching – allowing students space to feel</p> <p><u>Sense that RSE is very different to other topics</u></p> <p><i>Hearts on their sleeves</i></p> <p>Individual differences have a big impact on students experiences of RSE</p>
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<p>Value on the relationship and rapport between students and familiar staff members. Ja16</p> <p>RSE must be a safe space, free of judgement. Ja16</p> <p>Always aware of triggers during sensitive discussions. Ja16</p> <p>Safety in predictability within students' routine. Ja16</p> <p>Whatever it takes to help students feel safe and secure. Ja16</p>	<p>really important. Whenever we taught RSE or PSHE we made sure that it was our core class staff that were in, so I'd never time table that lesson for other staff to do. For example, if I was on my PPA, I would never get a cover teacher to teach that lesson. I would never do that lesson if I had a support staff member off, ill or away, and we had supply in. Because you really needed that safe space and those, you know that that environment where it was OK and they knew they weren't being judged and etcetera. Occasionally, not too much in the class I had we didn't have particularly challenging behaviour, but occasionally, you know, strong emotions could lead to challenging behaviour. So again, it's really important you got those familiar staff that would know the triggers and the signs and then how to deal with it. So that that was really key for me. We tended to keep it as well wherever possible on the same day. <u>Usually</u> in SEN you don't have as much of a set timetable, you know you don't always [unintelligible] geography on Wednesday afternoon, but with that specific lesson, where possible, I tried to keep it so it was a Thursday straight after lunch and that's what we did <u>every Thursday straight after lunch</u>. Again, to try and keep that sort of <u>familiarity and safety</u> aspect for the kids, they felt safe and secure in that's what they were doing, those were that adults that would be in the room when it was happening, and it was OK that whatever happened, happened.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, that sounds really important. I think it's not something I've heard of before as well, but especially like giving them that space and thinking about all those difficult feelings that can come up. I think that's really important and really helpful to know. So thank you for telling me about that.</p>	<p>Importance of <i>decompression</i> time</p> <p>Importance of knowing the students</p> <p>Safe space for RSE</p> <p>Risk of difficult topics deregulating students – <u>needing to know and hold a lot as a teacher?</u></p> <p>Keeping it predictable – different to other subjects</p> <p>Safety in predictability</p>
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<p>Struck by SEN students acceptance of difference. Ja17</p> <p>Disappointment in mainstream students lack of tolerance for difference. Ja17</p> <p>Heart-warming to appreciate students kind nature. Ja17</p> <p>Profound questions posed by students indicates their openness and curiosity to RSE. Ja17</p>	<p>And I'm just interested if you've got any sort of, like specific memories, maybe of any experience like lessons or anything you've delivered that really like kind of standout is significant in your practice that you could tell me about?</p> <p>Janice: I think, I think one of the things, the ones, that stand out for me that I can remember, especially now being in a different school, like when I look back at that time, one of the really key things that I remember is, like I mentioned, about the adult gay couple coming in and how struck I was with my kids acceptance of it. They were almost not bothered, in that they were just, like, great two men like each other, brilliant. Okay, crack on. Having worked in mainstream previously to this, in secondary as well, granted before this guidance was brought in but we still used to have to teach about relationships, etcetera. I can tell you for a fact that if I'd have just brought a gay adult couple into a classroom of 30 children, at least half of them would be <u>losing their minds</u>, making inappropriate comments, having something to say. And actually, really, they probably <u>should</u> have more understanding and acceptance of it than maybe my children, but it doesn't always work that way. So that that was, it was a really heart-warming moment as well for us. And they asked some actually really profound questions in their own way. So we sort of opened it up as, like, a free Q&A, with the permission of the two men that came in. And one of our slightly higher ability children, the boy that I mentioned, he was able to ask through support, through his TA, "Can you have babies?" Now, he didn't have the understanding of the <u>sexual</u> part but he knew that a man and a lady could normally end up producing a baby, and it came out the ladies tummy. So he'd made that link that they're both two</p>	<p>Struck by students acceptance of difference</p> <p>Stark comparison with mainstream – <i>losing their minds</i></p> <p><i>Heartwarming</i> – <u>appreciating students?</u></p> <p>Students open to and curious about difference in a non-judgemental way</p>
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<p>Seeing students making connections provides validation in teaching approaches. Ja18</p> <p>RSE is an ongoing process, continuously growing in light of students' progress. Ja18</p> <p>Wanting students to feel accepted and included. Dissonances risk making students feel more different. Ja18</p>	<p>men, so can the baby come out of a man's tummy? And it was really nice actually and the, the, the two, the two gentlemen we had in actually responded <u>really, really</u> well to that question, at a level my children understood, and it opened up the possibility then in future lessons to potentially then talk about, you know, adoption, other ways that families are created. Although that was towards the end of the academic year, so I wouldn't have followed up with that and I don't know if any follow up could happen because I left that school then, but it would have been noted on like my lesson plans and sort of on the school system, we would make notes of things like that, interesting points. So it would definitely been a note on there and I have no reason to believe why a colleague of mine <u>wouldn't</u> have followed that up the following year, and looked then at, like, say, you know, adoption, different types of family. And I think actually that would have been really key, knowing that some of our children were in local authority care and fostered and adopted, because it's making that link to <u>their</u> life. So that that was a really sort of profound moment where he was able to make that question, of his own accord, and make that physical link, that, that's two men and when Miss XX talks about babies, it's usually been a lady and a man. And then we had another child, one of the lower ability children actually, that was sort of asking, he was sort of asking in a roundabout way, the point he was trying to get across is, or what he was trying to ask was like, 'Do you get bullied? Does anyone say anything mean to you?', because we'd really highlighted that technically they're different being two men as opposed to a man and a woman. Yeah, it wasn't quite worded like that, but that's the point he was trying to get across. And again, the two gentlemen were great, they</p>	<p>Seeing students making connections – <u>sense of validation in teaching approaches</u> <u>Almost opening up students lived experiences</u> <u>RSE as an ongoing process – building, reflecting, adapting teaching</u></p> <p>Value placed on knowing individual students contexts – <u>almost ensuring that they feel accepted? Understood?</u> Linking to lived experience again.</p> <p>Student asking questions provides insight into their understanding.</p> <p>Students profound understanding of difference – <u>almost understanding inequality and</u></p>
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<p>Students have an awareness of difference, discrimination and prejudice. Ja19</p> <p>Students visibly distressed by the idea of someone being attacked because they were different. Ja19</p> <p>RSE has nurtured empathy and cultivated a culture of acceptance and kindness among students Ja19.</p> <p>A nice, memorable experience. Ja19</p>	<p>were willing to share some experiences in a watered down way for the children, and some of the children's faces when the one gentleman started talking about, and unfortunately, that he'd been a victim of a homophobic attack, physically, when he was younger. And, you know, as much as my children probably didn't understand the full implications and repercussions of that, they understood at a basic level: he'd been hurt because somebody didn't like that he was with a man. And they looked really sad, you know, they were offering him a hug, they wanted to know that he was OK. Because they still understood that that <u>wasn't</u> OK. They knew, you know, kind hands, kind feelings, kind words, that <u>hadn't</u> happened in that situation. And actually, from their experience of him, he was a nice man. Why would anyone do that? Like, say at a deeper level, I don't think they necessarily understood that it had been <u>specifically</u> done because he was a gay man. But, they understood that there was a <u>difference</u> there, and then someone had took it upon themselves to not, therefore, be kind. So that that was quite nice. It was a slightly longer session, obviously as well, because we had them in as visitors. And it was just a really chilled, really nice experience, Lovely to them engaging with sort of strangers, as so to speak. So yeah, that that lesson stuck with me a long time, actually, yeah.</p> <p>Martha: No, that's lovely. That's such a nice opportunity, I think, to be able to give to them as well. So that's really nice to hear about, and it's interesting you talking about like how children are kind of showing you that they've understood the content, like by asking questions and that sort of thing, and how have you found in other lessons that you've been able to kind of gauge that understanding?</p>	<p><u>discrimination (sadly based on their own lived experience maybe?)</u></p> <p><i>Children's faces</i> – horrified by the idea of hate crime</p> <p><i>Sad, offering hug</i> – <u>empathising with couple</u></p> <p><u>Taken aback by students kindness and acceptance</u></p> <p><i>Nice experience</i> – appreciating students kindness</p>
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<p>Use of frameworks to monitor engagement. Ja20</p> <p>Some ambivalence around evidence. Ja20</p> <p>Validating to see students reflecting on learning from RSE sessions in other spaces. Ja20</p>	<p>Janice: So when, sort of the first half, when we were doing more sensory based, we'd obviously we'd sort of assess learner progress by the engagement model, the Leuven engagement scales, of you know, were they just passive? Were they just sitting there? Were they showing some engagement, either by responding, making noises etcetera, etcetera? Or were they actively being able to get involved in the activities? And although that's generalised and can be generalised to any subject or topic, obviously, then we'd make specific notes about if they made an interesting reaction to a specific part of the lesson. When it became more evidence based, for sort of the second part of the year, it was easier to see because we'd have, obviously, sort of their doing stick worksheets, their online responses, to sort of gauge their understanding and we could literally physically mark them etcetera. And then we always had discussion time at the end, there again, if they'd asked questions, regardless of whether they're relevant or not, we make a note of that because it's still showed they were trying, willing to engage. Occasionally, which was really nice, every morning we used to have circle time, which is the time for anyone to bring anything sort to the floor. Sometimes on a Friday morning that would involve them mentioning or asking things that had been to do with the lesson on the previous Thursday, as they did about other subjects as well, but again, a note would be made of that because it showed they'd either retained something or it triggered them to ask something else, you know, or they've made a link. I know one student once, after we'd had that visit from the gay couple that were a man and a man, asked the next circle time "can a girl and a girl be a couple as well?" Because to</p>	<p>Continuous monitoring of engagement</p> <p>Back to evidence paradox</p> <p><i>Nice</i> to see students reflecting on learning from RSE sessions, bringing to other spaces</p> <p>Sense of validation in teaching</p>
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<p>Working with diverse thinking styles. Ja21</p> <p>Cautious not to confuse or overwhelm students. Ja21</p> <p>Seeing students break expectations. Ja21</p> <p>Value placed on covering equality and difference. Ja21</p> <p>Some concepts may be too challenging. Ja21</p>	<p>them, it was really black and white that, ohh Miss XX said 'gay' and they were men. So they were like, can gay be a woman and a woman? We hadn't quite got on to the vocabulary of lesbian, at that point, because we didn't want to sort of make it <u>too</u> confusing. But actually, it was a really nice teaching moment for us, because we realised that specific student probably <u>would</u> have understood the specific difference between a lesbian couple and a gay couple, referring to the <u>gender</u> roles in that couple. So that was sort of like a teacher moment for us as well, cause we were like actually we potentially underestimated that specific child a little bit in their level of nuanced understanding of those two terms. So, that was really, that was a <u>great</u> moment, you know, and we were able, or a member of staff was able, to have that discussion with that child about, 'Yes, the gay couple can be, you know, a woman and a woman, a man and a man.' Potentially, I think as they move through the school, obviously, transgender people and changing gender is addressed in the curriculum. I didn't ever specifically address that with the children I had, there would have been a plan to address it some point through the school. However, I think that would have been specifically really challenging for our students. Not to understand the concept, they would have, you know with the appropriate teacher, would have understood the concept that this person used to be a woman and now they're a man, etcetera, but the sort of reasonings behind it and the other people's viewpoints around it and everything that comes with it, I think, would be <u>really</u> challenging to get across in a way that they're able to understand. So it sort of <u>sometimes</u> felt to me like you were doing a little bit of an injustice because you were like, yeah, I could tick that off, I've taught about gay</p>	<p>Working with diverse thinking styles</p> <p>Not wanting to overwhelm students – <i>confusing</i></p> <p>Validating to see students' progress and understanding</p> <p>Underestimated student – <u>positive to see students breaking expectations</u></p> <p>Value on covering equality issues – <u>wanting to ensure that students understand differences</u></p> <p><i>Doing an injustice</i> – internal dilemmas around wanting to cover</p>
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<p>Concern that oversimplifying complex topics just to tick them off is doing an injustice to their depth and significance. Ja22</p> <p>Recognising your efforts. Ja22</p> <p>Balancing student needs with curriculum standards creates a level of doubt in competence. Ja22</p> <p>Remember to be kind to yourself. Ja22</p>	<p>relationships, but I haven't <u>really</u> taught about gay relationships, <u>really</u>, have I? I've <u>barely scratched the surface</u>. But I've done it, you then have to remind yourself, I've done it enough to a level that <u>my</u> children can understand. And again, that can be difficult as a teacher, whatever you're delivering, you know when you've got this model curriculum and you've got this guidance. And as much as you, like I say, you can tick it off, highlight it, say yes, I have technically taught that, but because you're not explicitly teaching whatever that specific bullet point says, you sort of almost feel a bit like, oh, God, have I done that right? Have I done it justice? And I think then it's really important to be able to self-reflect on your own context and be like actually, for my kids, I've smashed that. That's the only level they're ever gonna get to. So, with that understanding of that, so actually I've done great job there. You know, sort of be kind to yourself on that front, if that sort of made sense.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, I know. I think you know, it's quite a subjective subject, if you like, compared to some of the other subjects that you might teach about where it's a little bit more black and white kind of, the topics and the teaching. Whereas I think in RSE, it's yeah, definitely a bit harder to make those jurisdictions and like, do you ever talk to other members of staff and stuff around that as well?</p> <p>Janice: Definitely, especially again, in a special school where you don't tend to have as many subject specialist teachers at secondary level. You tend to operate in more of a primary model, so I was the class teacher, I taught every subject apart from French, predominately because I literally</p>	<p>equality issues fully yet not overwhelming students with complexity. <i>Barely scratching the surface. <u>Accessible yet oversimplified?</u></i></p> <p><i>Difficulty in having pride over teaching – <u>not following the guidance verbatim causes doubt in competence?</u></i></p> <p><i>Sense of justice again.</i></p> <p>Remembering to give yourself credit, easy to be self-critical <i>be kind to yourself</i></p>
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<p>Comparing notes. Ja23</p> <p>Debriefing to decompress. Ja23</p> <p>Fear around holding the weight of RSE alone. Ja23</p> <p>Sharing the load. Ja23</p> <p>Flexibility in the curriculum timeline alleviates pressure and facilitates a comfortable pace. Ja23</p>	<p>can't speak any French myself, so that wouldn't have gone well (<i>laughs</i>). So, you know, you talk with the class teachers, and again, the students were screened more on ability and need as opposed to specific age, roughly age banded, but not as strictly as it would be in mainstream. So, you know, my partner teacher, who taught the other equivalent of the year 9 class, we'd absolutely compare notes. And again, we tried to teach our lesson at the same time as each other as well, so that after and prior, but particularly after, we could almost have a debrief on a Thursday after school and be like, how did that go for you? What misconceptions did your kids have? Did mine have the same, etcetera, etcetera. What worked well for you? So I think that was really important, and probably easier to do than if you were the specific subject teacher for RSE/PSHE in a mainstream school. You might be the only subject specialist for that subject. You know, you might not have anyone to go to or debrief, or you might debrief into a head of department who's actually just humanities generally, whereas because we all had to teach it in school, everyone had some awareness of it, you know, and obviously right down to the primary staff. And that was really interesting as well, to see the progression and the sort of sequencing of the curriculum through the year groups, because we weren't bound, like 'by the end of year nine, they've got to have been taught this. By the end of year 10, they've got to been taught this.' We just knew by the end of their time with us, at 18 or 19, we'd got to have taught them the key stage 3 outcomes for RSE and the key stage 4 outcomes for RSE. But, actually, that can be done right up to the end of what would be key stage 5 for us.</p>	<p>Ability grouping</p> <p>Importance of collaboration – <u>sharing the load</u></p> <p>Needing to debrief – <u>similar to students needing to decompress. Acknowledging the weight of the subject.</u></p> <p><u>Almost a sense of fear around the idea of being isolated in RSE teaching experiences</u></p> <p>Flexibility in outcomes. Leaving space.</p>
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<p>Recognising individual achievements. Ja24</p> <p>Exposure to the full curriculum ensures readiness for adulthood. Ja24</p> <p>Teaching about difference in RSE facilitates a greater culture of belonging and self-acceptance. Ja24</p>	<p>Martha: So what would you say would be your, you know, in teaching RSE what would have been your goals, really, for your students? What would you have like to see for them?</p> <p>Janice: I think, primarily, that they've had exposure to everything we can offer them exposure to, related to the curriculum. And related to that guidance. From an understanding level, it's got to be individual, so that child's ability. I don't think I could put a blanket thing on it and say, you know, I'd want all children to have understood the concept of gay relationships by the end of, you know, by 19. It would be specific to that those children. But to have had exposure, either through teaching or experiences, to <u>everything</u> on that guidance and everything that the curriculum was trying to teach. And to have, obviously, then <u>hopefully</u> at least engaged with that exposure, for a lot of them. Especially, I think when it comes to the overarching ideas of acceptance, linking it to British values as well, is really important because that's always an overarching, you know, thing that that goes through every subject. The acceptance, the understanding and the awareness of the sort of key themes and if there's personal experience that can be linked to, obviously, that's <u>great</u> as well. And because, you know, it gives your children a sense of belonging as well, in society.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. You know, it's really interesting and I think just hearing you talk, like you do talk quite positively about your experiences really, and that's really nice to hear. And I know you mentioned about that you're, you've talked to your other staff member as well and that's kind of really helpful in, you know, addressing some of those barriers if you like. So I was</p>	<p><i>Blanket</i> approaches don't work in SEN</p> <p>Exposure – <u>some level of knowledge for adulthood?</u></p> <p><u>Acceptance of difference? Of oneself?</u></p> <p>RSE provides a sense of belonging</p>
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<p>Guidance, help and support? It was non-existent. Ja25 Supportive school system bridged the gaps left by the broader system. Ja25 Trusted to explore, given space to learn and grow. Ja25</p> <p>Recognising the contrast between linear subjects like mathematics and the dynamic approach required in RSE. Ja25</p> <p>Navigating uncharted waters together. Ja25</p> <p>Previous experience supported the transition. Ja25</p>	<p>just wondering whether there's anything else that really stands out in sort of contributing towards, you know, your experience in a way?</p> <p>Janice: I think, for me personally, it was overall a positive experience, but like sort of right at the start, it definitely had the potential not to be. The <u>lack</u> of guidance and support from the government, and from anyone in education really, about how to do it successfully with SEN students. It was non-existent. There was no help and support. I was really fortunate to work at a great school with a great team, with people that, one: Came up with great ideas and supported you. But, two: You know, gave me the freedom. I was a very free teacher in that school. They trusted me to go with an idea and run with it. And if it worked, it worked. If it didn't, then you would pull it back and try something else. I think that's really important in a subject like you were saying that isn't, as you know, linear and as black and white as say, maths. You've got to have sort of that space to experiment as a professional as well with what you think will work with your children. Obviously, in the first year of the guidance being brought in, I was probably a little bit more free than maybe a colleague would be now, because we were all in the same boat, we were all new. And so it was a bit of a sort of trial and error, so to speak. But then it did also help, like I said previously, at that specific school that we'd got some experience of delivering a lot of those topics through that previous curriculum that we had that was interlinked with the PSHE, etcetera, that navigator curriculum, in that you know, a lot of these topics weren't <u>foreign</u> to me. I wasn't picking up the RSE curriculum guidance and going oh my God, what is that? I don't even know how to teach that myself? A lot of</p>	<p>Lack of guidance and support – <u>too much uncertainty and openness left the potential for a negative experience</u></p> <p><u>School support system filling in the gaps from wider systems</u> <i>Trust – <u>trust from within but not from the outside i.e. Ofsted?</u></i> <u>Its ok to make mistakes</u></p> <p>Majority of curriculum very linear</p> <p>Trusting own skills</p> <p><i>All in the same boat</i></p> <p>Able to draw upon previous teaching – not completely novel</p> <p><i>Foreign</i></p>
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<p>Blend of professional expertise and personal life experiences. Ja26</p> <p>Even now teachers cannot access support. Ja26</p> <p>Seeking certainty through CPD. Ja26</p> <p>Not knowing whether you've actually done a good job. Ja26</p> <p>Experience is subjective – how do I know I'm doing the right thing? Ja26</p>	<p>it is also human experience and life experience, which helps. But, yeah, it wasn't like they just brought in something completely foreign and I was panicking, being like I'm gonna have to do my own personal development on this. On the subject of personal development though, there is none for teachers of SEN to teach this subject <u>even now</u>. Like, I've always just kept an eye on courses and stuff. That is something I would <u>love</u> to see. And do you know what, like, it would be oversold, oversubscribed, <u>all</u> SEN teachers would jump on that because none of us have had any actual real official training on delivering RSE. Like proper, as a standardised approach. You know, certain schools and maybe academy trusts might have now, now it's been in place a few years, have delivered their own, like in-house stuff. But, there isn't like a course you can go on and, you know, it's really, really important, actually sometimes that you have that explicit instruction yourself as a teacher. Because, as much as I've sat here and said to you, you know, <u>I think</u> I did a pretty good job and the leaders at <u>my</u> school were happy, doesn't <u>actually</u> mean I did a very good job and it doesn't <u>actually</u> mean I was doing what the curriculum was intended to do. Because obviously experience is subjective, and you know, until someone comes in and says, sort of like Ofsted but not really Ofsted, but whether you're doing a good job or not, or you know, you've got some sort of standardised <u>reference</u>, how do you actually know as a teacher?</p> <p>Martha: Mmm, no, absolutely. I think it's really important and I completely agree with you there. And, do you think there's anything else that you'd like to see happen to support teachers like yourself?</p>	<p>Importance on relating to own experiences</p> <p>Still no support</p> <p>Support would be oversubscribed <i>would jump on that</i> no official training – <u>sitting with uncertainty</u></p> <p><u>Not knowing – a high level of trust on your expertise</u></p> <p><i>“experience is subjective”</i> Seeking validation</p> <p>No way of knowing without guidance – <u>sitting with uncertainty</u></p>
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<p>Seeking peer support amidst no support. Ja27</p> <p>Peer support creates the biggest and most meaningful breakthroughs. Ja27</p> <p>Colleagues' first-hand teaching experiences goes beyond theoretical knowledge. Ja27</p> <p>Value on learning from teachers who have been there and done it. Shared understanding. Ja27</p> <p>They don't know what it's like. Ja27</p>	<p>Janice: Definitely. Like I said, the opportunity for CPD. From that, if teachers have been on like a course, etcetera, what is <u>really useful</u> post-course is the networking events after you keep in touch with those staff. And, you know, say once a month or whatever, you just meet up, or virtually whatever, and you just discuss your experience as much like I was doing with my one partner teacher, but on a much bigger scale. Because it's often through those discussions as a teacher, regardless of the subject, you make your most breakthroughs and you make your most meaningful changes to your practice. Because, you know, and anyone will say this in any job, anyone can sort of stand at the front of a hall and lecture on whatever, you know, and great, you've got a PhD in RSE. Brilliant. OK, you're gonna stand and tell me how to do it. But actually, that person's never been a teacher. So yeah, they know what they're on, they know what they're talking about, but they don't know how to <u>actually</u> teach it. So doing that with your colleagues, that you know, you know they aren't making that up, you know that they're not, you know, saying it for the sake of it. They've been there, they've done that. <u>Those</u> sort of recommendations and ideas of practice are the most valuable for teachers because it's coming from a fellow teacher and I think that's important, you know, when considering like as much as I'd love to see some professional development courses, I don't particularly want, you know, some scientists, some doctor from somewhere, standing somewhere and going, "You must cover this, this and this. This would be good for autistic learners because..." You know, a lot of courses tend to generalise as well. OK, might be good for some autistic learners, might not be good</p>	<p><u>Wanting external support across school systems – seeking guidance amidst no guidance</u></p> <p>Value of peer support</p> <p>Importance of a shared experience – <u>espoused vs in practice. Knowing vs knowing about.</u></p> <p><i>most valuable fellow teacher – shared experiences, sameness.</i></p> <p>Differences, not sharing experience, less understanding.</p> <p>Recognising students individuality</p>
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<p>The idea of more specific guidance is a dream, far from reality. Ja28</p> <p>Students being able to finish education with greater equality in outcomes. Ja28</p>	<p>for the ones I have, etcetera, whereas you know, if you're talking to specific teachers who can specifically say, well, I've got this child A in my class, who displays these needs and I did this with them, you know, you can be like, oh, God, yeah I've got a Jimmy in my class the same, you know.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, absolutely. So having so the networking and then in light of CPD, it's kind of a bit of both really having some of that professional sort of 'scientific', I guess, like you said expertise <u>and</u> also having a bit of feedback I guess from the people on the ground actually doing it in practice, because like you say, you know you can say one thing, but when you're actually doing it, it's a completely different experience, or at least it can be. So, it sounds like those two things be really important. Is there anything else? That you think would be helpful to you?</p> <p>Janice: I mean, eventually moving forward, I think it'd be great if the government wrote a specific curriculum for SEN students. I don't know how feasible that would be, they probably won't bother cause they haven't for anything else. But, you know, you can dream. If I could say anything, I would absolutely, you know, if they gave us specific sort of, and I don't think just RSE I think I'd have to pie it into like PSHE and personal development as a <u>whole sort of subject</u>, but actually if they gave a guidance for SEN students that by 19, when most of them leave education, there were sort of these outcomes. That would be quite helpful for planning for teachers.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, it sounds like kind of reducing the subjectivity a little bit maybe would be helpful. Yeah, that's really</p>	<p>Desire for more guidance</p> <p>Recognising the challenge - <i>You can dream</i>. Feels like a big ask.</p> <p>Not specifically teaching guidance but clearer understanding of outcomes – <u>sense of equal opportunities?</u></p>
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<p>High risk of safeguarding concerns. Ja29</p> <p>Safeguarding concerns will happen right there and then. Ja29</p> <p>Teaching RSE opens the opportunity for emotionally heavy discussions or disclosures. Ja29</p> <p>Holding the weight of safeguarding disclosure and having to put on a brave face. Ja29</p>	<p>interesting, and we're sort of starting towards the end now. So, I'm just curious as to whether there's anything that we haven't covered, that you think, would be really helpful, you know, to know about from your experience?</p> <p>Janice: I don't think so, I think the only thing I'd highlight in working with SEN learners and teaching this sort of subject is that you're probably more likely to have sort of safeguarding concerns and, you know, a lot of things ended up being recorded as cpoms or safeguarding concerns from <u>our</u> lessons that maybe you wouldn't experience as much in mainstream, or wouldn't necessarily come out, so to speak, in mainstream, in a <u>lesson</u> situation. They're probably more likely to be picked up at social times or from, you know, reports from home or reports from teachers, etcetera. But because, or certainly the type of learners I taught, they're (<i>pause</i>) you know, they don't, they don't <u>hide</u> anything, for want of a better phrase. They are who they are right there and then. If there's going to be a reaction or a disclosure or a whatever, it's going to happen <u>right there and then</u> in the lesson or when that specific topics mentioned, you know, they haven't got particularly the ability to mask or to you know hold it in. So I think, you know, actually it could potentially be, depending again on your specific cohort, well quite an <u>emotionally heavy</u> subject to deliver for, for staff. You know, and actually that could maybe need to be considered on the timetable. If I'd had a cohort of 10 that were particularly safeguarding heavy, luckily my specific cohort weren't particularly heavy safeguarding wise, and had a lot of disclosures, I know I would have really struggled to have taught that half an hour lesson and then gone straight into maths. You know, as an experienced professional you</p>	<p>Safeguarding concerns more likely to come up – <u>emotional load</u>?</p> <p>Differences with mainstream RSE</p> <p>SEN students less likely to mask emotions or disclosures compared to mainstream students. Less social inhibitions? – <i>they are who they are</i></p> <p><i>Right there and then</i></p> <p><i>Emotionally heavy</i></p> <p>Some cohorts more vulnerable – <i>lucky</i> to have lesser risk of concerns. <i>Struggling</i> with the emotional load of safeguarding concerns.</p>
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<p>Making the space to feel and protect your own wellbeing. Ja30</p> <p>The idea of holding a high level of safeguarding concerns is extremely overwhelming. Ja30</p> <p>Unrealistic nature of acting as though a disclosure hasn't affected you. Ja30</p> <p>Safeguarding happens right there and then. Ja30 It's just part of the role. Ja30</p> <p>RSE opens a space for safeguarding to come up. Ja30</p>	<p>still need that decompression time yourself and that time to be like, wow, OK, I've just heard something is actually really upsetting. I just need a second for this. And I think that would be the thing I'd be wary of if I was to teach this subject in the school I teach in now. It's a primary school, but if I was to teach the secondary school that's next to the primary school in our area, where I teach now, it's very deprived and I would be <u>extremely concerned</u>, even though it's mainstream, to teach RSE in that setting. Because I know, that <u>a lot</u> of that lesson would be taken up with things that I would legally have to then do something about, you know, disclose and actually how do you then go on to your next period and go right, history now guys it's fine, like?</p> <p>Martha: And it sounds like that's quite a heavy level of responsibility then to hold as a teacher in that lesson?</p> <p>Janice: Yeah, it definitely can be. And like you say, it's specifically teaching RSE or PSHE are the two lessons where you, you know, if they're gonna come up <u>in a lesson</u>, tend to be when those things come up, and although you know it is part and parcel of being a teacher, and it happens at other times too, I think you know, you are sort of technically opening yourself up a bit more to that in that situation and then specifically with SEN students, like I say, because they're gonna do the reaction or the response <u>when</u> you mentioned the thing, because they don't have the ability to delay or hide it or whatever. So you know, if you're talking about particularly sensitive topic or something that's particularly triggering for one of your kids, you could really be opening yourself up to, you know, a heavy session so to speak, and if you haven't necessarily clocked onto that prior</p>	<p><u>Decompression again. Protecting and advocating for own emotional wellbeing.</u></p> <p>Different contexts create different experiences.</p> <p><u>Emotional labour of switching contexts quickly between a difficult conversation and a new subject – forced to mask.</u></p> <p>Acknowledging the challenges of RSE/PSHE <i>Part and parcel</i> – dealing with concerns is unavoidable.</p> <p>Opening the floor.</p>
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<p>Putting yourself in an emotionally vulnerable position. Ja31</p> <p>Five minutes to put on your brave face and carry on. Ja31</p> <p>Facing emotionally distressing days alone. Ja31</p> <p>Burning out from the weight of holding emotional challenges alone. Ja31</p> <p>Seeing the severity of emotions resulting from trauma/safeguarding. Ja31</p>	<p>this session as well, it could really hit you like a ton of bricks, you know, you're just going about your day teaching and then suddenly you're like, wow. OK. You know, and hopefully if you're working in a nice school where you've got support around, you'd be able to, you know, step out for five or whatever. But, the reality is there isn't always the facility to do that so you've just gotta carry on as the teacher. You know, you <u>have</u> to just put on that brave face and carry on, you've got your next lesson to do, and actually then where do teachers go? You know, we don't have supervision. You know, like therapists, social workers, we don't have sort of really debrief time. You might be able to talk to a member of staff in your school. I was very lucky that I could speak to my co-teacher about stuff. But if you don't, you're taking that home with you then, you're taking it with you and that's on your shoulders then, so to speak.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, yeah, I know. That's really important. And how do you when those sort of safeguarding issues happen in lessons like how do you handle it and how do the other students kind of respond to that, are they aware?</p> <p>Janice: I think. They tend to be less <u>aware</u> in SEN, unless the disclosure of the incident has resulted in and challenging behaviour. You know, if a big period of emotional dysregulation has occurred, then <u>obviously</u> everyone is aware because they could see physically something's happened. But if it was just to be like a verbal disclosure or a response to something that was only noticeable by the adults then I think actually it wouldn't particularly affect the children, which is good, less so than in mainstream where you know pretty much if someone says something, all the</p>	<p><i>Hit you like a ton of bricks</i></p> <p><u>Emotional impact of suppressing own responses to prioritise student needs.</u></p> <p><i>Step out for 5 – <u>is that really enough?</u></i></p> <p>Sense of holding distressing topics alone.</p> <p><u>Potential for burnout if there are limited support structures in place?</u></p> <p>SEN students generally not aware of safeguarding concerns unless visible.</p>
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<p>Differences in how disclosures are perceived and spread in mainstream vs. SEN environments. Ja32</p> <p>Tension around staff needing to know about students' needs but also needing to protect their identity. Ja32</p> <p>Lack of structures to support teachers causing confidentiality lapses to safeguard their own mental health. Ja32</p> <p>Seeking certainty though CPD. Ja32</p>	<p>kids are gonna have heard it, they're gonna know and often then you get the rumour mill going and it becomes a whole thing more than it is. You tend to not find that in SEN, you know, they haven't got the ability usually just come up with a rumour based on the snippet of information, so you're not going to get that. But then I think also as teachers, there's a long way to go in us, not always, or some teacher then sort of going, oh did you hear about so and so doing this? We're not meant to tell other people about disclosures and that, but there <u>can</u> be a very gossipy culture in some schools. And I think sometimes it's more so in an SEN school because everything is so communal and everything is so shared and all the staff do <u>need to know</u> a lot of things about the kids. Sometimes maybe the line is occasionally blurred or forgotten about when it comes to safeguarding, and actually without thinking and with no malicious intent, or you know you, you pop into the staff room and someone's actually telling another member of staff, "you'll never guess what you know, XX just told me about so and so." And you're like, hang on a minute actually, that shouldn't be being repeated out loud to anyone. And going back to like what I said, because as a teacher, you've got no supervision or necessarily any time to decompress. It's human nature. You know, you've just dealt with something quite heavy. You wanna sort of offload, get it out, sort yourself out. So maybe, you know, if there was associated guidance to do with that as part of, you know, future guidance on teaching RSE that would be amazing. And again, there could be tailored CPD courses to do with specific safeguarding disclosures related to the topics in the curriculum. You know, cause we all do general safeguarding training as teachers, but actually if</p>	<p>Safeguarding concerns can be amplified in mainstream.</p> <p>Concerned about lack of confidentiality among staff. <i>Gossipy culture.</i></p> <p><u>Blurred lines – sense of ethical dilemmas. Needing to support one another with emotional challenges yet less protective of students?</u></p> <p>Lack of structures to support teachers leading to confidentiality issues.</p> <p>Desire for support with challenges.</p>
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	<p>you're teaching that subject, maybe some specific training would be good actually.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, yeah, yeah, it's definitely a lot to hold and I think it's a very like you said, it's a very sensitive subject, so it's like maybe one of the ones where you get less support and you kind of need it more than ever, I think in many ways. But yeah, I can see we're coming to the end of time now. So I'm just going to end the recording sort of thing there.</p>	
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Danielle's interview

Experiential statements	Transcript	Exploratory notes (Descriptive, <i>linguistic</i> , <u>conceptual</u>)
<p>A necessary challenge. D1</p> <p>Helping students understand what's happening to them. D1</p> <p>Difficult in many ways. D1</p> <p>Every child is different and so RSE is always different. D1</p>	<p>Martha: Start my recording. OK. And I'll just start with my opening question which is, please can you tell me about your experiences of delivering RSE for children and young people with learning difficulties?</p> <p>Danielle: OK. So it's, what we find here at [school name], is it's one of the most <u>important</u> areas to teach, I suppose, for our young people because teaching about relationships, and how relationships work, and how it works in society, and all those expectations is something that our students naturally find very confusing and very challenging, but it is also one of the (<i>laughs</i>) hardest areas to teach as well here. Partly because of their understanding of the <u>content</u>, and their experiences of people around them, and their difficulties in understanding their own emotions, particularly those that are going through puberty and what's happening to them. So it's so important to explain what's happening to them and try to kind of make it as <u>real</u> as possible, but at the same time, it's that those emotions and feelings that they're going through, which can quite often result in them displaying certain behaviours, makes it even more difficult to teach that kind of content. What we find here is that it's taught differently in every class, as is most of our learning here, because each class, although we're a school for young people with complex and profound needs, and they <u>all do</u> have complex and profound needs, they are <u>all</u> completely different. So</p>	<p><i>the most important area to teach – <u>sense that RSE should be a core subject</u></i></p> <p><i>naturally confusing and challenging – inherent difficulties meaning that support is vital.</i></p> <p><u>A necessary challenge</u></p> <p>Complex on many levels.</p> <p>Physical changes – potentially quite distressing?</p> <p>Risk of challenging behaviours</p> <p><i>Difficult</i></p> <p>Every child is unique. <u>Importance of not generalising.</u></p>

<p>It's always different. There is no one answer. D2</p> <p>Most challenging, most important. D2</p> <p>A constant in the classroom. D2</p> <p>Doing our best. D2</p>	<p>each class - I suppose in a way that makes it really challenging for the teachers to kind of plan and think about the best way to deliver the information that - they talk and they share ideas but ultimately the way it's taught in one class and the key messages that are put in one class are different from another class and different from another class because each class's needs are are different and their ability to understand is different. So I suppose that's challenging in itself for the teachers too, because they've got to almost - It's bespoke in every class and that makes it quite difficult.</p> <p>Martha: And so how do you, teachers like yourself, how do you kind of go about planning and – [Danielle interrupts]</p> <p>Danielle: So we've got our own curriculum. We rewrote our curriculum around four years ago and we've got 4 strands to our curriculum and one of those strands is PSHE, which covers all of the RSE learning. The reason that's one of our strands is, as I said, it's one of the biggest areas that we know our young people find the most difficult. So in each strand, there is 3 levels of learning and our pupils that are the most profound will be learning at Level 1. Level one is very cross curricular. It's very much about here and now and the experience is and here and now and lots of repetition, because those pupils in Level 1, who are Level 1 learners have the most significant learning needs, they need - it needs to be completely immersive and happening <u>every</u> single day and then happening in lots of different contexts. And then we've got our Level 2 and our Level 3. So our teachers use our curriculum, I suppose as a starting point they think about we try to group our students as best as we can, so we've got mainly our level ones together and our</p>	<p><i>Challenging – quite negative language yet not taking away from the importance of the subject.</i> Working together.</p> <p><i>Different, different, different, different. – <u>no such thing as a right answer?</u></i> <i>Difficult</i></p> <p>RSE exists within PSHE, yet key focus. <i>Biggest areas</i></p> <p>Ability grouping depending on level of need.</p> <p>Brushed over level 2 & 3 – <u>more emphasis on level one... needs more thought, more attention?</u></p> <p><i>As best we can</i></p>
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<p>Creating clear structures provides a sense of containment. D3</p> <p>A need for guidance and structure. D3</p> <p>Striving to address complexities as best we can, acknowledging the multitude of challenges. D3</p> <p>Recognising that rigid structures may not always accommodate the dynamic nature of the students they support. D3</p>	<p>level twos and our level threes. But there is always crossover. So the teachers will use the curriculum as their starting point and think about what needs to be taught if you're a level 1 learner, level 2 and Level 3. Then there's also obviously topics, because we're all through as well, so we're 3 to 19. So as well as thinking about our curriculum, it's also what's what should be taught in which particular key stage in each department. So they'll look at our curriculum documents and think about these certain topics that are going to be taught when they're in primary and in upper primary and into the secondary so that guides them too. So those are, I suppose those are the starting points for planning and the other area that tends to, there's the EHCP's as well and all of the information that EHCP's and the targets that come from the EHCP's which quite often link with our curriculum anyway, but not always. So again as best as they can, the teachers will also look at the EHCP targets and think right this particular topic or this piece of learning links really well with that target so I can do both of those at the same time, and then the other, there's a lot of - not a lot of, but there's quite often ad hoc planning going on as well because we'll have young people that are presenting with things like wanting to explore their bodies, but wanting to explore their bodies <u>openly</u> and there's lots of teaching that then has to be done about public and private. Or we'll have young people that are struggling, maybe starting their periods or struggling with their <u>emotions</u> and, I suppose it's tweaked as well depending on what's being presented for a young person, or even a group of them at the time.</p> <p>Martha: So it sounds like you do some of the sort of individual ones and then with those more specific sort of</p>	<p><i>What needs to be taught</i></p> <p>Very structured.</p> <p>Clear framework within school helps teachers plan.</p> <p>Looking at EHCPs.</p> <p><i>As best they can – <u>sense that perfection is impossible.</u></i></p> <p><i>Ad hoc planning – managing individual and group needs simultaneously</i></p> <p>Adapted based on student needs.</p>
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<p>RSE is always relevant and benefits everyone. D4</p> <p>Bridging the gap between home and school. D4</p> <p>Students should be supported to exercise their rights in a safe way. D4</p> <p>Humour helps to alleviate discomfort. D4</p> <p>Puberty is a significant and challenging time. D4</p>	<p>needs, do you then do that more individually or is that brought into the whole class?</p> <p>Danielle: So we do, we do some pieces individually, we do some of it as a group. Because some of it is actually relevant for all, even though one young person isn't necessarily demonstrating the same behaviours as another, we're aware that potentially you know, things like exploring your body is something that they do tend to go through, especially when they're coming into puberty. So although it will benefit one in particular, it potentially will benefit the whole class as well. So we'll do a lot of work around that. But some of it is done very individually and some of it is done in conjunction with the parents as well, because parents will come to see us and say "we're <u>really</u> struggling." You know, they want to masturbate all the time and we're struggling to control that and how do we manage that? And that's when we'll devise something that's really specific and we'll plan it with the parents as well and try to come to some kind of an arrangement to allow that young person to <u>explore</u>, the way they should be able to explore, but also trying to teach them about the time and the place and, you know, what's done in society (<i>laughs</i>) and what isn't.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. So do you find that parents are quite typically looking for further support from yourselves at school?</p> <p>Danielle: Yeah. Yeah, particularly the way <u>it</u> manifests itself, I suppose at home more than anything is quite often in very challenging behaviour. Sometimes parents come to see us about behaviour and then it hasn't even occurred to them, I think. I think because their children have got quite significant</p>	<p>relevant for all – <u>RSE topics are relevant and helpful</u></p> <p>beneficial to all</p> <p>Supporting home with struggles.</p> <p>Working together.</p> <p><i>Should be able to...</i> - <u>not shameful some humour – yet some discomfort?</u></p> <p><i>It emphasised – a thing, an object, a person? Sense of puberty's significance</i></p>
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<p>Parent relationships are a priority. D5</p> <p>Delicately balancing parent perspectives with student's needs. D5</p> <p>Students should be allowed to exercise their rights safely. D5</p> <p>No student is the same, no family is the same. D5</p> <p>A willingness to extend a helping hand. D5</p>	<p>needs, they see them as - they're not necessarily - it doesn't come to the forefront of their mind that actually as well as significant needs and the diagnosis that their child has got, they are a teenager as well and their body is going to go through the changes, even though cognitively their mind might not understand what's going on. So sometimes it's a simple conversation of, "do you think perhaps they're, you know, at the early stages of puberty?" and this could be this, and this could be and then that realisation kind of sets in, and then we talk about things that we can do to allow that young person to manage how they're feeling, to explore themselves <u>safely</u> and understand those feelings, so sometimes it's about supporting the parents to acknowledge, I suppose, potentially what's going on, and quite often it is through discussions of behaviour. Sometimes the parents are <u>completely</u>, you know, "I know this is what it is, but it's happening all the time and it's happening when we're out in public and how do I resolve that?" So yeah, it's a mixture.</p> <p>Martha: OK. Yeah. So it sounds like you have quite good relationships with parents in your school then?</p> <p>Danielle: We do. We have really good relationships, we I mean they - we run a lot of cup of coffee mornings and the uptake for that, we've got an RSE one coming up soon actually in the next few weeks, and the uptake can be a bit hit and miss depending on what's happening for the parents at that time. But they do tend to, although they might not come to the coffee morning, they'll <u>reach out</u> to us if there's difficulties, they will communicate that to us.</p>	<p><i>some hesitation there – <u>not wanting to offend, parent relationships are important.</u></i></p> <p><i><u>Don't see them as teenagers?</u></i></p> <p><i><u>Difficult to hold both?</u></i></p> <p>Challenging to see physical age past needs.</p> <p>Helping parents understand their children – <u>respecting them and their perspectives whilst ensuring needs are met.</u></p> <p>Again sense that masturbation, puberty etc. isn't shameful. Focus on safety.</p> <p>Differences in family contexts.</p> <p><i>Reaching out... <u>Helping hand?</u></i></p>
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<p>A push to bring RSE into the spotlight. D6</p> <p>Commitment to recognising students right to explore relationships. D6</p> <p>Advocating for rights whilst acknowledging environmental limitations. D6</p> <p>Breaking down barriers. D6</p> <p>Balancing parental views with students rights and autonomy. D6</p> <p>Balancing rights and safety. D6</p>	<p>Martha: I'm quite interested in your like the - So have you have you had RSE coffee mornings before and what's that been like for you?</p> <p>Danielle: We've had, we've done ones around kind of growing up. We've not specifically, I suppose, we're trying to really push it more this year, the RSE side of things. So we've done things around puberty and periods and what we were wanting to talk a lot more about, with that RSE coffee morning that's coming up, is the relationship side of things as well, and thinking about relationships and how to safely allow their children to have relationships with other people because we've seen (<i>pause</i>) quite a big number of, quite a large number of students I suppose, wanting that closeness with other students, but because we were a special school, because the children all come in on school buses, because it's not the same kind of <u>network</u> that you would have in the mainstream where you've got play dates after school or kids arranging to meet up to go out on the weekends, those relationships can only go so far. And so I suppose we're trying to get this the parents to think a little bit more about extending those relationships for their children and thinking about if two in a class have got a particular bond, how could you nurture that? How could you develop that relationship? They don't <u>like</u> to think about their children having boyfriends or girlfriends because they see them as children with special needs, and that's not, I suppose, for not all but the majority of the parents, I suppose that's something that doesn't quite enter their minds, but we are trying to kind of get them to see that it's healthy and it's something that you <u>should</u> explore if your child is showing you they want to be close to somebody, but it's about being <u>safe</u> as well because</p>	<p>Recent push around RSE.</p> <p>Again, focus on safety rather than prevention. <u>Normalising RSE.</u></p> <p>Students wanting intimate relationships.</p> <p>Environmental limitations.</p> <p><u>Breaking down barriers? Sense of advocacy.</u></p> <p>Again, difficulty holding needs and physical age together.</p> <p>Beyond thinking.</p> <p><i>Should</i> – <u>again emphasis on rights.</u></p> <p>Holding both rights and safety.</p>
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<p>Pushing for RSE. D7</p> <p>Acknowledgment of students vulnerability in their reality. D7</p> <p>Fear around students exposure. D7</p> <p>Giving students a voice gives them the right to say no. D7</p>	<p>obviously our young people have got very limited understanding about safety and, you know, we've talked a lot about consent and how to teach consent. What consent looks like having managed consent at school.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, so the safety's really important there then?</p> <p>Danielle: Yeah.</p> <p>Martha : What other topics do you find are, like, really key in your teaching?</p> <p>Danielle: So definitely, I mean, consent in itself is something that we've pushed a lot this year. We've done a lot of talking about the fact that our young people, particularly those that have got really complex medical needs, they are exposed to a lot of people throughout the day. You know, they have personal care needs, and we have teams of five to six adults in a class, and there's different adults taking them, and they have carers at home, they have lots of medical appointments and their bodies, I suppose, are exposed to lots of people at lots of different times and it's - we've tried to really promote the fact that we want them, although they need those things in order to manage their day, it does leave them vulnerable in that they are almost used to anybody can come in and take me to the bathroom, change me and I'm not gonna say anything and it's trying to get them to recognise that there are times where there are things that we do where we have to do, but that doesn't mean that if they're not comfortable at a certain point that personal care is happening, or they want somebody else, or it's somebody completely unfamiliar, that they shouldn't be voicing, they</p>	<p>Practicalities.</p> <p><i>Pushed again.</i></p> <p>Students vulnerability - acknowledgement of dark realities.</p> <p><i>Exposed – vulnerable. Weighty word when you think about it...</i></p> <p><i>Anybody</i></p> <p><u>Again, sense of human rights.</u></p>
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<p>A fight for effective and appropriate RSE. D8</p> <p>Not taking RSE serious leaves students at risk. D8</p> <p>Giving students the knowledge and skills to speak up and protect themselves. D8</p> <p>Use of resources and symbols to support students communication. D8</p>	<p>shouldn't be saying actually this is wrong. I'm not, I don't want this. We've had a big push on using very specific vocabulary when we're doing personal care, or anything around the body, how using words that are not specific, not using, not using words like penis and vagina <u>again</u> can leave them really vulnerable because, they may, their parents might use a pet name for their penis and they don't understand, and then they can't articulate if something has happened. The difficulty there is, is that the majority of our pupils are non-verbal or at the really early stages of language, so although we're exposing them to this language, it's how we get them to be able to use that language if they needed to talk about something that is potentially happening to them.</p> <p>Martha: And so with the more nonverbal learners, how do you sort of go about teaching about and enabling them to communicate?</p> <p>Danielle: So we've got we use symbols, we use a system called PODS, I don't know if you ever come across it before? It's called pragmatic organisational - I can never remember the full name of it - They're basically communication books and it was devised in Australia and a lot, a lot of the more kind of profound schools are using this system for communication. So they vary depending on the pupil's ability to understand the symbols in the books and depending on, there's some that you can get if you're visually impaired, so they do all vary and some are books that students use completely independently and some are partner assisted. But what they are basically is these books with lots and lots of symbols and lots and lots of categories.</p>	<p><u>Push again – sense of a battle, having to fight for things.</u></p> <p>Necessary skills for safety.</p> <p><u>RSE is about giving students the knowledge and skills to speak up.</u></p> <p>Resources to support communication.</p> <p>Specific to profound needs.</p>
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<p>Finding ways to give students a voice. D9</p> <p>Self-expression is crucial. D9</p> <p>Whatever it takes to give students a voice. D9</p> <p>Communication comes first in RSE. D9</p>	<p>So there's pathways that you follow that can lead you to have various conversations. So there's a category, for example, on the body and you can use the book to say 'I'm asking you a question. I want to talk to you about your body.' You would then go to the section where it's about body, it's all colour coded and numbered, and then you could use the book to potentially have a conversation about that young person's body. You can ask them, there's feeling section, there's opinions within those books. So you could talk to them about different parts of their body, and you could talk, you could then ask them how they're feeling, you could ask them opinions, you know, there's lots of different ways of, kind of conversing about the body and what's happening to the body. And there's, you know, because of the pathways you can kind of flip back and forth. They're quite sophisticated for <u>some</u> of our students and some of the others it's using symbols, and we use, some of our pupils have got what we call eye gaze devices. So, cognitively they've obviously got the understanding, but physically they can't use those books, so we have them on their eye gaze devices. We use communication boards and where we can, obviously we'll use, so we've got two teaching kind of <u>dolls</u> that we use. So where we can, we'll get those dolls out and we'll talk, you know, about the different parts of the bodies on the dolls and use the symbols to reinforce that and use images if we need to kind of back it up in that way. So we do it, we do it as much communication as we can in that way, but there's always (<i>pause</i>) It's- it's, the trouble is, is that some of our, particularly more of our younger students, are at such early stages of their communication <u>anyway</u>, and are still learning about the systems that we've got and embedding their systems and recognising symbols and</p>	<p>Making RSE accessible for all.</p> <p>Giving students a voice.</p> <p>Lots of options – opening up avenues for communication.</p> <p>Again dependent on student need.</p> <p>Physical adaptations.</p> <p>Exploring methods of communication – <u>value on supporting self-expression.</u></p> <p>Communication as a key barrier to RSE – <u>how can you cover such</u></p>
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<p>Opening the doors to infinite communication. D10</p> <p>Navigating uncertainty whilst striving for the best. D10</p> <p>It takes time and energy. D10</p>	<p>responding to symbols that, until that communication is really embedded it can be difficult for the teaching side of things, does that make sense?</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, and what does that- how do you kind of go about that as a teacher?</p> <p>Danielle: Well, for some of our younger learners, particularly our most profound ones, we start by teaching them how to kind of develop their yes and no responses. We believe that if we can teach them yes and no and, a really <u>good</u> way of responding to yes and no then, oh we can ask them infinite questions. And so when we are using a communication book, or a board, or a symbol, if they've got a really clear yes and no response, then we can ascertain if we show them a symbol of something and ask, you know, we can ask them a question and they can give us a yes and no. But again it's (<i>pause</i>) it's, it's difficult <u>sometimes</u>, not with all of our learners, but with some of our learners to <u>really know</u> when you're asking them a question if that yes and no response is a <u>true</u> reflection of what they're thinking and how they're feeling. So it's a lot, a lot of practice. A lot of embedding yes and no as much as we can, using our yes and no symbols using the other symbols that we've got and lots of repetition. Lots and lots of repetition.</p> <p>Martha: And with the older learners as well, how do you find teaching and sort of and knowing whether they've sort of understood your teaching as well?</p> <p>Danielle: I suppose it's quite often checking it through their communication system, so after we've done the teaching,</p>	<p><u>abstract, complex topics with limited communication?</u></p> <p>Very important to support communication – <u>almost a sense of freedom?</u></p> <p>Difficult to know what students are really thinking – <u>having to hold uncertainty?</u></p> <p>Comes with practice. No quick fix.</p> <p>Checking understanding.</p>
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<p>You know that you can't protect them all the time. D13</p>	<p>really worrying and it does, you know, obviously it plays it, it weighs down on you because you, you know that you can't protect them all the time, I suppose.</p>	<p>Burdens of uncertainty. Wanting to do more.</p>
<p>Too many people to know who to trust. D13</p>	<p>Martha: Yeah. And I guess that's a big part of your role, really, isn't it? And especially in them going on to adulthood is making sure that they can protect themselves.</p>	<p><u>Lacking trust in others.</u></p>
<p>An overwhelming amount of adults. How do I know who's safe? D13</p>	<p>Danielle: Yeah and because, as I said earlier, because our pupils are, have got so many people in their lives, you know, I suppose in a way that almost increases the risk, you know the average neurotypical child does not come in contact with as many people as what our pupils do on a daily basis. The amount of people that- from having a carer in the morning to getting onto the bus, with a with a bus driver and a passenger assistant, to coming into school and having around five or six members of staff in your class, and physiotherapists, and speech therapists, and nurses coming in, and then getting back on the bus to go home, and having <u>another</u> carer, as well as your family, and other appointments that they have throughout the day. There's a lot of people that they come in contact with.</p>	<p>Lots and lots of people. <u>Feels overwhelming, too much to hold in mind even. Sense of Danielle's thoughts spiralling.</u></p>
<p>Frustration with varying provisions. D13</p>	<p>Martha: Yeah, and preparing them for that sort of level of vulnerability, I guess, and are you able to access support in your school when you have sort of difficult experiences like that?</p>	<p>Variation in support – <i>controversial</i> – <u>sense of frustration</u></p>
<p>Frustration with varying provisions. D13</p>	<p>Danielle: So in that particular situation, with that young lady, obviously that was taken straight to social care. I do find it varies (<i>pause</i>), I sound very controversial now, it varies what borough. So this young lady is out of borough, and when I</p>	<p>Variation in support – <i>controversial</i> – <u>sense of frustration</u></p>

<p>The student was heard. D14</p> <p>We need to fight for them together. D14</p> <p>Children’s services are clear and supportive. D14</p> <p>Adult services are absolutely shocking. D14</p> <p>The student wasn’t heard. They didn’t understand. D14</p> <p>Frustration with adult services for not sharing an understanding. D14</p>	<p>took it to the social worker and we had a an urgent meeting about it all, they were very quick to, they were very quick to react and although there was no <u>specifics</u> about who or where, they were very much like it still needs to be explored, we still need to do a piece of work, we still need to think about, you know, what might have happened even if we can't get the answers and they've been very supportive and that's ongoing. Whereas I had another situation, with another young lady that was <u>in borough</u> and the response was not so much- I find, when our young people come under children's services, and the children’s social workers and children's services in general, there's a <u>lot</u> happening and there is a lot of support, and I the systems are really, really clear and I know who to go to and who to talk to. And nine times out of ten things are addressed. I find when our young people move over into adult services, it is absolutely shocking in [local authority name], and this other young lady who came under adults, who had disclosed something it, when I reported it took a about ten days until a social worker came out to see her. She was then expected to repeat what she'd told, but within 10 days' time, that information was not as clear as what she said on that day and then I was told that “it's not clear whether something's happened, so we're not going to take it further.” And that's the, that's the worrying bit that I think, I think what I find is that the rules for the for our young people when they move into adult services are as if they <u>are</u> adults, but they are not- although they are adults within <u>age</u>; cognitively, developmentally, they are <u>not</u> adults and that's not always taken into consideration when dealing with issues that have come up and that's the thing that I find the most frustrating, I would say.</p>	<p>Taken seriously. <u>We. Sense of people coming together. Student heard.</u></p> <p><i>Not so much</i> - Lacking consistency between services, hesitation around speaking negatively, however.</p> <p><i>Lots happening, 9/10, support – seems very extreme positive end of the spectrum.</i></p> <p><i>Shocking</i> – adult services very negative. <u>Polarised perceptions.</u></p> <p>Unreasonable expectations. <u>Lacking shared understanding? Not heard.</u></p> <p>Let down.</p> <p>Navigating differences in cognitive and physical age – <u>sense of protection?</u> <i>Most frustrating</i></p>
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<p>Laugh it off. D15</p> <p>Fighting losing battles. D15</p> <p>Knowing that you've done the best you can. D15</p>	<p>Martha: Yeah, I know it sounds very frustrating and it sounds like you're fighting a lot of battles, really as a teacher. And how do you kind of manage that within yourself? It sounds like it's quite a lot, a lot of weight on you.</p> <p>Danielle: <i>(sighs and laughs)</i> I speak to the other senior leaders here, so I speak to the head teacher quite often. I escalate it as much as I can, so that I suppose, I feel really uncomfortable in myself knowing that this information has been shared with me and I've tried to take it further and it it's, I've got it and I've got all this, potentially for some of our people's, historical information and it's not being listened to. So where I, I try to always ensure that at least I've reached out and told as many people as I can, so that and never want anything awful to happen to our students, but if anything further down the line did come to light, I suppose, I would know that I tried my very best to reach out to as many people as I could and escalate it to the managers and make sure that somebody was listening to my concerns so I could say that I'd done everything that I could possibly do.</p> <p>Martha: And I guess you know in teaching RSE and enabling that young person to be able to communicate that, then you know that you've kind of helped them, I guess see the best of your ability. Yeah, well, thank you for sharing that. That sounds like a really, I mean it sounds- does that is that sort of experience come up quite a lot with the safeguarding side of things in RSE?</p> <p>Danielle: Yes, very much so, very much so in that we, we kind of, there's indicators that things are happening, our pupils obviously, I actually had one social worker say to me, "well, they haven't disclosed anything, so there's nothing I</p>	<p><u>Humour to cope?</u></p> <p><u> Holding discomfort – fighting losing battles</u></p> <p>Knowing that you've done the best you can</p> <p>Not being listened to.</p>
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<p>Horrified to see student’s voices ignored. D16 Complete disconnect from students realities. D16</p> <p>External services don’t understand. D16</p> <p>It’s my responsibility. D16</p> <p>Wanting to know more. D16</p> <p>A need to offload worries. D16</p> <p>We have to keep fighting. D16</p> <p>There’s always a next step. We can’t give up. D16</p>	<p>can do until they disclose” and that shocked me to the core because I was like if you are expecting any of our students to say, you know openly, this is what happened and this is what happened then you- it's <u>impossible</u>. They <u>are</u> disclosing, they're disclosing through their behaviour. Their behaviour is showing us that something is not right. That is their disclosure. We're not going to, you know, and we <u>know</u> because there's history that things have in the past have been a certain way. So surely their behaviour is their disclosure in itself. But yeah, it does come up quite often.</p> <p>Martha: And do you like, how do you does your school kind of support you in being able to manage those sorts of situations? Do you get like training and stuff?</p> <p>Danielle: Yes, so I’m the designated safeguarding lead for the school and so I do go on all of it. I do go on all of the safeguarding training, but I also go on all the RSE, any RSE, my headteacher is really good so there's a couple of bits I've put myself on to go recently, so I'll try and go on as much training as I can. She'll make sure that she always does coaching with me. She's a trained coach for safeguarding. So we'll do, we'll do coaching regularly where I can just kind of, we'll look at a particular case and talk through everything that's been done and then I can just share any worries that I've still got about that case and we can think about anything else that I could potentially do. We, in our in our senior leadership meeting weekly, we have a safeguarding check in weekly anyway so we always bring the ones that I'm kind of dealing with and working on to that meeting and say I'm still worried about this and we'll talk about it between us all and just make sure that we're, A) all aware and, B) kind of</p>	<p><i>Shocked me to the core – total disconnect.</i></p> <p><u>Behaviour is not enough... RSE almost bridges the gap? Gives students the skills they need to be heard?</u></p> <p>Support within school. Wanting to learn – <u>more knowledge, stronger fight?</u></p> <p>Offloading.</p> <p><u>Anything else I can do – being stuck, still fighting. Human rights and for protection?</u></p>
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<p>Important to come together. D17</p> <p>It comes with experience. D17</p> <p>Finding a way out of the mud. D17</p> <p>Knowing your students and working together to ensure best outcomes. D17</p> <p>Talking and sharing knowledge. D17</p> <p>RSE as an ongoing narrative. D17</p> <p>Making the space to solve challenges. D17</p>	<p>sharing potential problem solving ideas you know, thinking about what to do next.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, that sound really good. And with your like other staff as well, not just in terms of safeguarding I guess, but in terms of RSE like how do are they able to access support, how do they find those more difficult topics like from what you're aware of anyway?</p> <p>Danielle: So they will come to, so they'll either come to me or they'll come to our outreach teacher, who is like our PSHE lead. She's been at [school name] for a very, very long time. Lots and lots of experience. And she's very good at teaching those kind of things. So I know a lot of the teachers tend to go to her and say I'm <u>really</u> stuck on this bit. I'm not quite sure what to do here, and we can plan something together and have a little think about how to address. Like sometimes they'll just kind of, a lot of our teachers have been here for a long time, so a lot of them have had, particularly as you move higher up to school, a lot of them have had the students when they were younger. So a lot of the time I'll hear teachers saying "Ohh did you see this behaviour or did this happen when they were in your class? What did you do? Could we could we do this? Could we do that?", and they will just share ideas back and forth so there's a lot of opportunities to talk. We've done a big push on focusing on our teachers meetings, having a PSHE focus at least once every half term where we'll just sit down. So last week we did it, we were talking more about <u>independence</u> rather than RSE, but it, we will obviously do RSE as well, but we'll have like a focus and we'll talk about, right, what, what are we finding difficult around the areas of</p>	<p><i>What to do next – <u>not giving up</u></i></p> <p>Coming together.</p> <p>Value on experience.</p> <p><i>Stuck – <u>undercurrent theme... all feels a bit stuck? Muddy.</u></i></p> <p>Strong, long lasting relationships.</p> <p>Knowing the students, working together. Answered questions.</p> <p>Keeping PHSE narratives alive.</p> <p>Making space for difficult topics.</p>
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<p>A culture of investment and understanding. D18</p> <p>Mainstream RSE is a tick boxing exercise. D18</p> <p>RSE is everybody's responsibility. D18</p>	<p>independence? What's our challenges? What can we embed further? What do we need to tweak? What do we need to look at? And we'll try and problem solve in that way.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. So it sounds like collaboration is quite key then to, you know, making sure that you're able to provide the best support possible and what sort of you do speak quite positively, I think about your experiences really and what else do you think has kind of contributed to that experience?</p> <p>Danielle: I suppose it's working in an environment where <u>everybody</u> is so <u>invested</u> in these young people and their development. I spent the majority of my teaching career in mainstream, and that's not to say that mainstream schools don't do amazing things, I had the best time in mainstream. I absolutely loved it. You know, but they are limited, I suppose, in a way of although you teach PSHE/RSE, you teach it through the curriculum, the National Curriculum, and teach it through the schemes that schools have brought in and teachers do tweak here and there, but essentially you're teaching PSHE once a week. That's your kind of bit done. I know a lot of mainstream schools are now investing more in this kind of pastoral support type role, where you're finding a lot more people doing that role within schools. But here at [school name], it's almost like everybody's got that role, you know, everyone's got that hat and they don't just expect the pastoral leads to kind of think about that issue and address that issue. <u>Everybody</u> in that class that is coming into contact with that young person is thinking about that issue, <u>everybody</u> is thinking about how we can address it. They're talking to the parents, they're looking at the people's</p>	<p>Solving problems together. <u>Becoming unstuck?</u></p> <p><u>Shared experience. Shared understanding.</u></p> <p><u>Sense of mainstream RSE as a tick boxing exercise.</u></p> <p><u>RSE is everyone's role – sharing the weight, sharing the responsibility.</u></p> <p><i>Everybody, everybody.</i></p>
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<p>You have to work together. D19</p> <p>Invested in student outcomes. D19</p> <p>Fear of adult services. D19</p> <p>We need to do what we can to get them ready to go. D19</p> <p>Everybody wants the best. D19</p> <p>Wanting to take on responsibility and doing the best you can. D19</p> <p>We do the best we can. D19</p> <p>Exhausting all options. D19</p>	<p>behaviour plan if it's presenting as a behaviour, they're talking in their class meetings, they're liaising with me or potentially other professionals or with the parents, and they're just so invested in making our young people at the school as <u>well-rounded</u> as possible, I suppose, and as independent as possible and as successful as possible, because we recognise that the opportunities when they leave [school name] are so limited and there's so much that they need to be able to know and so much need to be able to do to have the best quality of life. So it just comes from a working environment where everybody just wants the best for the students, so they'll take that time out. It was such a, so different for me, from the way that I've worked the way the teachers take the time out to really teach something so specific that's a real barrier, and don't think I'm gonna pass it on to the SENCO, I'm gonna pass it on to the behaviour lead, I'm gonna pass it on to the learning mentor. No, no, I'm gonna deal with it. It's happening in my classroom. I'm gonna look at it, and I'm gonna deal with it as best as I can.</p> <p>Martha: Hmm. Yeah. So it sounds like even though, I mean, you were talking a bit about having quite a high level of responsibility with RSE, obviously in terms of safety and preparing for adulthood and all those sorts of things. But it sounds like in your school staff kind of take that role and like, share out that responsibility so it's not too much on one person?</p> <p>Danielle: They do as best as they can. Obviously, there's the odd case here or there where it's the teacher comes to me and say I've tried everything like, like we've got a young man at the moment that is tearing his clothing on a daily basis</p>	<p><i>Talking, liaising. – <u>you can't do it alone?</u></i></p> <p>Preparing for adulthood. <u>Fear around adult services. Pressure to do what you can in the limited time you've got.</u></p> <p><i>Everybody. <u>Shared experience, shared understanding.</u></i></p> <p>Wanting to take on that responsibility. A real personal sense of care.</p> <p><i>Tried everything, best they can -</i></p>
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<p>Doing the best we can but still not giving up. D20</p> <p>Sexual behaviour isn't shameful in itself, it's just about safety. D20</p> <p>Enduring challenges. D20</p> <p>Getting needs met is the priority. D20</p>	<p>and doesn't matter how many times we replace his clothing, he is going through this issue and it, it may be a sensory need or it may be- I think he's kind of found his body (<i>laughs</i>) and wants to see his body quite often, so the class has been trying to deal with that as best as they can within their class, but obviously it's got to the point where they've exhausted everything that they can do, say that they've then come to me and we've kind of had a bit more of a chat about it and had some other thinking about some other ideas and we've spoken to the parents, and sometimes it's (<i>pause</i>) sometimes you can never quite resolve the issue <u>completely</u>. You've just got to kind of almost work through that behaviour? Not that we want him to be stripping all the time and removing his clothing, but I think we've got to take it with what we've been doing is taking him somewhere private and trying to get him to understand that actually, if you want private time, you can't just remove all your clothing and tear everything off in class. You know it's not appropriate, and until he makes that connection, I suppose we've got to endure the tearing of clothing at the moment until he gets beyond that that phase.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, they're like breaking it down, really, and taking it one step at a time, I think.</p> <p>Danielle: I'm speaking to his mum about maybe allowing him to have that time at home where if he doesn't want to have clothing on, he has a little bit of time in his room and gets that <u>need met</u> because he's clearly very frustrated at the moment.</p>	<p><u>Sense that it's still not enough, always wanting to do more</u></p> <p><i>Awkward laugh</i> <i>Best they can</i></p> <p><u>Exhausted everything – sense of how challenging it can be. Burning out?</u></p> <p><i>Unresolved</i></p> <p>Again, emphasising that sexual behaviours aren't shameful you just need to be safe.</p> <p>Getting needs met is priority.</p>
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<p>Adapting to a range of needs. D21</p> <p>RSE as a constant within the classroom. D21</p> <p>Depends on the student and class needs. D21</p>	<p>Martha: Yeah. And I think, yeah, I was just thinking as well, it sounds like that flexibility that you have in your curriculum is quite important. And so do you have kind of that you said you kind of have like a base curriculum and then do you kind of as teachers kind of decide where there's need for flexibility and that sort of thing?</p> <p>Danielle: Yeah. Yeah. So we've got our, as I said, we've got our own curriculum that we wrote with the 3 levels. And we do have expectations of, depending on what level the student is working at, it determines how much of, that those kind of, those four key areas are taught. So if there are, we've got PSHE, communication interaction, physical and sensory, and then our cognition curriculum. And if you're PMLD learner, a really profound learner. Those four areas all kind of interweave anyway, so the structure of your day and the structure of what you're teaching is very kind of intertwined, and teachers will tweak it and think, actually, I need a little bit more of this and a little bit less of that. But as we move more into level 2 and Level 3 curriculum, it's a little bit more structured as what you would kind of see in a mainstream, so you would have a communication lesson, which would be like a literacy lesson. But again, it's tweaked depending on what's happening in the class and how much of whatever that class needs?</p> <p>Martha: And did your curriculum and teaching kind of change from September 2020 onwards or was it quite similar to what you were already doing before then?</p> <p>Danielle: You mean during the pandemic?</p>	<p>Different levels of RSE depending on age and stage.</p> <p>RSE as a constant within the classroom for more complex needs.</p>
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<p>A lot all at once. D22</p> <p>Laugh it off. D22</p> <p>RSE/PSHE became a priority post pandemic. D22</p> <p>The pandemic was hugely disruptive for students. D22</p> <p>Taking steps back and building everything back up again. D22</p> <p>Helping students to feel safe and secure again. D22</p>	<p>Martha: From when it became like compulsory, essentially.</p> <p>Danielle: So it changed, it kind of it's kind of all merged into one because we'd written our new curriculum and the pandemic had happened just as we'd finished our new curriculum, and RSE came in during that time as well (<i>laughs</i>). So it kind of all just was a process that happened all pretty much at the same time. So yes, it has changed. But that there's been a number of reasons why, I suppose the introduction of our curriculum anyway kind of tied really nicely with RSE becoming statutory, but also the pandemic meant that PSHE became, PSHE itself along with RSE, actually became something that we had to almost completely focused on as a school and build the communication, everything within those sessions because our pupils were so, had such difficult times over the pandemic, with some of them not being at school and that their usual routines being disrupted and regression in, you know as I said to you, the repetition is so important for our learners to make progress and having big chunks of time of not being in school meant there was a lot of regression in in key learning and key skills. So we had some build everything back up again. So we're kind of at a stage now where we're able to structure, we can we still need the RSE and the PSHE, but we can pull it back a little bit because we're now back that place where we've built everything back up, built our routines back up and those relationships and the systems back, are back in place properly. Now that we're out of the pandemic.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. So it sounds like it kind of came at a time of change anyway that you kind of, as school already like were</p>	<p>A lot at once. <u>Humour to cope?</u></p> <p>All came together in the end.</p> <p>Pandemic was particularly challenging for students.</p> <p>Taking steps back.</p> <p>Starting again.</p> <p>Relationships and routines - <u>Post pandemic focus on helping students feel safe and secure again.</u></p>
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<p>Not many people outside of the system who understand. D23</p> <p>Mainstream RSE is just different. D23</p> <p>A need for greater shared understanding. D23</p> <p>No experts, no answers. D23</p>	<p>doing a lot of change and adapting to things and everything. And yeah, I hadn't thought about really, to be honest, the impact of the pandemic in that way with the sort of repetition or lack of repetition at the time. It's interesting. OK, so in terms of like, just looking at time, in terms of like looking forward, what would you say would like kind of further your experience or like help your school and other teachers like yourself?</p> <p>Danielle: It'd be really nice to network more. I've joined the [local authority name] RSE network and they meet regularly, but there's not many special schools that are in that network. So although I'm having conversations, it's really difficult to, and I'm meeting with other leads from other lots of other discussions and the focus that they're having isn't quite the same as what I need here. You know, they haven't got pupils that will just masturbate in school openly or remove their clothes. They don't have those kind of issues because their children, they have <u>different</u> issues around kind of gender identity and that which (<i>pause</i>) we don't see as much of here, so I suppose it'd be better to link in with more special schools and have more kind of networks and conversations and have a little look at the curriculum and how other schools are teaching it, I suppose special schools really, although each special school is unique and is different, it's just good to share practice like that which doesn't happen so much. You've got to make those links yourself. And there's no real kind of, I suppose experts, if you like, in [local authority name], so that you've got various people that work for the local authority that, you've got like a literacy lead that works for the local authority that gets all the other literacy coordinators together, and you've got science and you have</p>	<p><u>Sense of isolation.</u></p> <p><u>Isn't the same – lacking that shared experience.</u></p> <p>Sense of <i>difference</i>.</p> <p>Sharing knowledge and practice.</p> <p>No experts, no guidance.</p>
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<p>Having to figure it out on our own. D24</p> <p>We're doing as much as we can but we need help. D24</p> <p>Parents need somebody to go to. D24</p> <p>We can't solve everything. D24</p> <p>Laugh it off. D24</p> <p>Doing what we can. D24</p>	<p>got a PSHE / RSE one but it's very mainstream focused and she can't quite give me the answers or even just think through some of the possible strategies that I need for here. We're having to devise it very much ourselves.</p> <p>Martha: Yeah. So having like a designated person then cause I guess, yeah, that's true it's like that not- because it's so different in special schools, really, isn't it? So making sure that you've got someone who's expertise is kind of tailored to those differences and understands that. Yeah, I can actually understand that would be really important. And is there anything else that you think would kind of really help your experience?</p> <p>Danielle: No, can't think of anything. Apart from, I mean it's not really not really down to the school, but just services for parents around that area, you know, we try to do as much as we can as a school, but, is there people out there that could, you know, talk to the parents a bit more about some of the behaviours that they're seeing at home? And that they potentially need somebody to go to as well. They're, not all of them, but what I find is there are a good few that will expect us to, they'll come to us with the behaviour, "They want to do this all the time. They want to remove their clothing or they're doing this when we're out in public. Can <u>you</u> teach them how to stop doing that?" (<i>laughs</i>) and they expect us to solve that problem, but don't really know that it's got to be, we can work on it for sure we can, you know, we can talk to them and do that fundamental teaching about private and public and take them out in the community and get them used to being out in the community and the way that you behave, and talk to them about relationships, but it</p>	<p>Mainstream focused – <u>sense that special schools are overlooked.</u> <u>Alone again.</u></p> <p><i>Doing as much as we can...</i> there are limits. <u>Parents alone too?</u></p> <p>High expectations on school. Waving a magic wand.</p> <p><i>Humour – <u>coping with unrealistic expectations?</u></i></p> <p><u>Doing their best again?</u></p>
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<p>Knowing your students is key. D26</p> <p>Working together to figure it out. D26</p> <p>Holding a barrage of questions which may never be answered fully. D26</p> <p>Trying our best. D26</p> <p>Not knowing if you're doing enough. D26</p>	<p>Martha: Yeah, yeah, yeah. So there's a lot of unpicking, really and trying to, but I guess that comes in knowing your young people as well, really. And how do you kind of go about doing that would you say?</p> <p>Danielle: So one of the one of the things obviously is knowing them, knowing, I mean the teachers will always come and say to me this is happening. It's never happened before. They'll know when something's new, and then well it's a lot of investigation, it's a lot of talking to the parents. Has anything changed at home? Could this be contributing? Could that be contributing? And then it's thinking about the school environment, what's happening in the school environment at the moment? Is there, is this causing it? Is that causing it? And it's just kind of a lot of trial and error, let's tweak this, let's change that. Let's look at their behaviour plan. Let's think about strategies we've got in their behaviour plan. What do we need to change? Let's talk about this behaviour with their pop book, let's- you know it's just lots of trying and seeing if we can get to the root of it and putting things in place to distract or diffuse, deescalate and help regulate. Sometimes I'm mindful, I suppose, that whilst we're doing a lot of distraction and a lot of regulation and offering them that space and offering them deep pressure massage or a bounce on the trampoline, are we doing enough to really unpick where that came from in the first place?</p> <p>Martha: Yeah, that's tricky, but I guess it's hard, isn't it? That's one thing you maybe never know as well. So sitting with that uncertainty must be quite hard. And I guess that links to your talks about safeguarding everything as well is</p>	<p>Importance of knowing your students. Relationships are key.</p> <p>Working together.</p> <p><u>Lots of questions. Possibly will never truly know the answer?</u></p> <p><u>trial and error, trying... doing what we can?</u></p> <p><i>Are we doing enough – uncertainty.</i></p>
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	<p>there's always, it sounds like there's a lot of kind of not knowing and having to be comfortable with that in many ways or when to know. Maybe went to stop and be like, OK, I've done what I can because it's a I guess it's a bit of a subjective barrier really. Would you say so?</p> <p>Danielle: Yeah. Yeah.</p> <p>Martha: No, that's really interesting. Alright, well I will end that-</p>	
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Appendix M – Table of Personal Experiential Themes

Rosie's PETs

HARD TO KNOW: MAKING DECISIONS WITHOUT GUIDANCE			
Subthemes	Experiential Statements	Page number	Quote(s)
Making ambiguous decisions amid ambiguous guidance	Ambiguity in RSE guidance and expectations creates a sense of confusion in staff bodies.	12	"definitely a bit of confusion as to what to do... we don't know exactly what it is that is expected in terms of, you know, the <i>(pause)</i> not a <u>legal</u> basis, but you know, in terms of what the government are expecting us to deliver..."
	Greater responsibility on schools and teachers to determine appropriate content / delivery strategies.	2	"with... SEN, they, you know, the guidance says 'teach what you need to' <i>(laughs)</i> so it's very much like on the school and the teachers to make those decisions, which is quite tricky."
	Tension arising from the uncertainty around what content is most appropriate for individual students.	2	"it can be quite tricky to know <i>(pause)</i> what they should be <i>(pause)</i> looking at"
	Anticipating the potential trajectory of a student's life path.	3	"...thinking, right, this child is, you know, this is how their life is potentially going to play out. Like, are they going to have, are they going to be in a situation where they might have sex? Like for some of them? No. Like they are going to be probably in some sort of.. either living at home or they're gonna be in a supported facility for their whole lives.

	The weight of deciding what students need to know in terms of RSE feels beyond teachers authority.	4	"saying like they will, they won't. Like, that seems really like, you know, beyond our authority in some ways."
	Risk that teachers may not do the right thing in RSE.	12	"A lot of, yeah, discussion about what, what the right thing to do and say is, yeah, happens a lot."
	Fear of doing the wrong thing.	20	"it feels more, it feels more sort of crucial that you get it right? I think things like, you know, the maths and the English curriculum, you can't go too far wrong if you're covering numbers (<i>laughs</i>)"
Am I doing the right thing?	A need for greater clarity.	20	"it would just be useful to have some guidance on like what is appropriate for kids at, you know, who have this sort of profile"
	Wanting an expert who can bring clarity on what is deemed right or wrong.	21	"It would be useful to have somebody, you know, who's an expert in adults with autism, for example, and who knows about the relationships that people with severe learning difficulties have when they're older. Who could actually say 'oh by the way, you know, the adults that we're getting out of school, they could really have done with some more work on, you know, appropriate touch or you know duh-duh-duh'."
Strength in connections	Collaborating with colleagues helps to contain some of the difficult feelings associated with making decisions about students RSE.	12	"...among staff it's just like there's a lot of just talking to each other and being like, what do you think? What do you think? What do you think?"

Collaborating with parents allows teachers to share the weight of decisions in RSE, providing a sense of validation.	4	"it's all about like speaking to the parents and being like, oh, this is, you know, they've been doing this at school (<i>laughs</i>). Like you know, what do you want? What would you like us to work on with them?"
Stronger home-school relationships within SEN foster parents' trust that teachers have their children's best interests at heart.	10-11	"I think because we have way more of a dialogue with the parents about individual lessons and things like that than we would do in mainstream, and I think particularly at my school, there's definitely just much more trust from the parents in some ways that we're... we've got the kids best interest at heart"
High level of trust and support from SLT.	19	"I think you know the head and deputy head, like SLT, are just very supportive on us knowing the kids.... It's very much like they're your class, you know them, do whatever you think is best."

TENSION SURROUNDING LABELS

Subtheme	Experiential statements	Quote(s)
	Navigating the discrepancy in 'cognitive' and 'physical' age.	3 "I did have some kids who were verbal, who had, you know, were working sort of broadly at, you know, Key Stage 1 sort of level with some of their work. But, had the hormones of a 15 year old"
	Tension around labelling CYP based on developmental stage.	20 "if there was almost like a developmental stages guidance, you know. Again, it's very difficult to label kids depending on that, but it would just be useful to have some guidance on like what is appropriate."
		13 "a couple of the kids were sort of on the more able end, and you know, we're working like using... It's all so hard to know how to say it, but higher, slightly higher up I suppose you say in things like maths and English"

LEAVING THE NEST: PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD

Subtheme	Experiential statements	Quote(s)
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	Not knowing what happens to students once they leave school.	21	"I think, like as a staff body we don't have a huge amount of experience with adults beyond once they've left school like, we don't really know like what happens to them in some ways?"
Transitioning into the unknown	Adult services are awful and depressing.	21	"...it was actually really awful and depressing because it was just so much worse than what we provide them in terms of structure and resources, and you know, all the individualised curriculum and stuff. They just don't get that anymore."
	Distrust in other services.	22	"Because that's like a major safeguarding thing, like if we can get them toilet trained and so they're not having to rely on somebody changing them. That's like a major thing. You know, one for their like confidence, but yeah, two from a safeguarding perspective..."
	Long-standing relationships with staff evokes strong emotions when students leave, as the bonds formed over time create a deep sense of attachment.	22	" when they some of them have been there you know for 15 years sort of thing. It's always very emotional. And they have all these pictures from when they're really little and everything."
Letting them go	Leaving the safety of the school environment for adult services can feel like entering the daunting big bad world.	22	"And school again, it's like, feels like a very safe environment from a safeguarding perspective. You know, we just don't know what it's going to be like for them."
	The bond between staff and students almost resembles that of a family.	12	"because the kids stay in school for so long and we've, you know, we've only got 90 kids, you know from 4 to 19, everybody knows them so well, you know, and staff who've been with them, you know, they've known them since they were tiny"

Preparing students to transition into new environments is filled with a familial sense of protection and responsibility.

21

So I think the options once they leave school are so much more difficult to manage and like to access. So I think yeah, there's quite a lot of yeah, responsibility that we feel a lot of responsibility for getting them ready to go.

EMBRACING CHANGE

Subtheme	Experiential statements		Quote(s)
Embracing authenticity over uniformity	Following the guidance verbatim would result in forcing a fake lesson for ofsted.	2-3	"in some ways it's maybe for the best that it's broad, in some ways, because you know for some of our kids, you know, particularly the ones who have PMLD, for example, they have got very little awareness of what's going? You know, we're working on them responding to light, you know, them responding to touch, that sort of thing. So saying, you know, they need to understand consent is going to be like... that's like, you know, <u>so</u> beyond what they're working on, it would just be like be, shoe on trying to like, do some sort of fake lesson for ofsted."
	Mainstream education feels like inauthentic assembly-line slog, prioritising uniformity.	18	"...that sort of celebrating the very, very tiny steps of progress that they make is, you know, so different to mainstream which is so focused on like are they reaching their like end of year attainment goals? And you know it's just this constant like slog to get them all up to the same point."
	Stark transition from mechanical and rigid nature of mainstream curriculum delivery, devoid of flexibility.	2	"Even I think the Council I was in literally was like here's the language that they need to know. They need to know... in year three they need to know penis (<i>laughs</i>), like but it's very just like duh-duh-duh-duh-duh"

	In mainstream education a blanket approach is used, often neglecting individual needs and failing to involve collaboration with families.	4	..in mainstream you basically just say here's our lessons... are you withdrawing your child from this part of it or not? You don't really get into like, oh, I'm gonna talk to your kid about duh-duh-duh because they're struggling with this. It's very much just, like blanket approach whereas we call up parents and say like? Ohh, you know, they seem to be showing some interest in this so would you like us to work on, you know, appropriate boundaries with you know the their friends in class or, you know, compared to with staff sort of thing?"
	Questioning the importance of adhering to the curriculum in RSE when it's applied more flexibly in other subjects.	15	"I don't know how like how important is it? You know, that they that they know it and is it such like a crucial part of the curriculum? And I think so much, you know, the rest of our curriculum is very much like it's, you know, not based on national curriculum at all really, it's completely separate."
	A sense that not looking at 'sex' explicitly needs to be justified.	8	"My class we didn't get on to sex at all because they're still, you know, really looking at yeah, differences between male and females. Ohh and like, you know, life cycles, you know, looking babies and you know, talking about pregnancy and that sort of thing. But it yeah, it would just be too advanced, really for them to be looking at sex at that point."
Adapting to new approaches	Struggle to align curriculum objectives with student needs, as the guidance is irrelevant to students lived experience.	1	"...that's where it's tricky really, because there's sort of, you know, the guidance and some you know, objectives, for what they should be looking at, and you try and you know follow those as much as possible, but for the vast majority of time it's just not suitable for them."
	Feeling the need to rationalise teaching approaches that diverge from traditional content.	13	"...they're on like a sensory curriculum, basically, where they're not, they're not looking at covering <u>content</u> as such, it's very much just based on their sensory needs.... like doing intensive interaction with some of our like severely autistic kids like that is them building a relationship with one specific member of the team and that's kind of their RSE, you know, content."

RETHINKING RSE IN NEURODIVERSE EDUCATION			
Subtheme	Experiential statements		Quote(s)
Navigating neurodiversity	It's hard to know how students think and what sparks their curiosity, necessitating the management of uncertainty.	9	"we know a lot about things that they want, things that they need, but sort of more abstract stuff, like, what they think about their own body is very hard to work out."
	Navigating differences in thinking between staff and students.	20	"I think. I think cause obviously in mainstream, like, you are the adults. You know, there's neurotypical people, so we know like what we need as, or what we could have used as kids, whereas it's a bit different."
	Verbal discussions allow deeper insight into the way students think.	8	"I think generally in mainstream for RSE, so much of it is conversation and you know with my, like mainstream like year three and four class like a big chunk of it was like ask me any questions you have? Like what have you been thinking about? What have you been worrying about? And you know the stuff that they've come out with like so much of the lesson would just be chatting about, you know, I remember them asking like why do boys have nipples? You get into this whole like chat about it and that would be and then you'd get more from that. "
Reflective growth	CYPwLD have a lesser sense of difference than neurotypical teachers.	14	"You know, all term you'd be saying, you know, is [unintelligible] a boy or girl and they had no idea, you know, random guesswork every time. And I thought that was just so interesting because they were obviously just not classifying people how we did and they were just not it, it's almost like it was completely irrelevant to them"

Working with CYPwLD has led Rosie to reflect on her own values and narratives pushed within society.	14	"I sort of thought like, why are we pushing this so much? (laughs) Like, does it really matter that much? Do we really need them to know the difference between boy and girl?" "I thought that was really interesting cause I just thought like is this therefore the right thing to be doing with them? If it doesn't matter to them like, is it relevant to their life at this point?"
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LIGHT HEARTED APPROACHES

Subtheme	Experiential statements	Quote(s)
	Humour can help to alleviate feelings of discomfort.	9, 6 & 4 "...the three boys I'm thinking of you could kind of tease them out of it, you know (laughs)." "It's a lot about, yeah, appropriate behaviour with masturbation comes up a lot (laughs)." "So yeah, one of my boys was, you know, masturbating at school (laughs). So we then did much more of like a one to one thing..."
	Light hearted approaches to RSE can help to model normalisation of topics.	9 "But you know, say oh, I know, I know it's uncomfortable talking about a penis (laughs). You know, things like that, and they'd laugh, but, you know, be yeah just kind of trying not to embarrass them too much basically, but being clear, you know, it's OK to talk about these things like you know every, you know, everyone's got a body."
	Rosie feels comfortable with RSE whereas some colleagues don't.	10 "I don't mind it, but a lot of people do struggle with it, particularly some of our TA's..."
	Taking a more relaxed approach to RSE fosters a more comfortable atmosphere, reducing cultural tension.	10 "sometimes the TAs might be delivering part of it, or maybe to a small group, something they hate doing. I think it's just real sort of British uptightness in some ways (laughs) in some ways, just a bit uncomfortable for them sometimes, but I don't, I don't mind."

Jennifer's PETs

ADVOCATING FOR INCLUSIVE AND EMPOWERING RSE			
Subthemes	Experiential Statements	Page number	Quote(s)
Overlooked and forgotten	Frustration with the lack of consideration for pupils with severe learning difficulties in government guidance.	16	they're kind of talking more about like schools for pupils with moderate learning difficulties rather, it's almost like pupils with severe learning difficulties are kind of just like forgotten, which is crazy because actually they're probably the pupils who need this the most
	Caught in a paradoxical scenario.	16	it's kind of frustrating, because yeah, it sort of feels like, even when Ofsted came here a few years ago, they were like <u>amazed</u> that we were teaching them some of the stuff we were teaching (<i>laughs</i>) and I was kind of like, well, <u>obviously</u> , I mean, yes? This is because of the <u>guidance</u> ?
A core component	Advocating for students rights.	21	I feel very passionately that people with special needs <u>should have</u> equal opportunities and access to all of this information and should be able to have relationships, sexual relationships, if that's what they want, when they become adults.
	RSE is paramount in ensuring that students have the skills necessary to keep themselves safe.	7	the <u>real statistics</u> which show that you know pupil's with special needs are really much more vulnerable and open to, and more statistically likely to be abused and things like that. So, it's so paramount that as part of this curriculum they can kind of learn to identify and communicate things or parts of their body correctly.
	Increased access to RSE is vital for students, reflecting a sense that it should be a core element of the curriculum.	7	I guess also because of the new rules around like exclusion it's now much harder for parents to exclude from it, like some of them might have previously been excluded and now are having access to the information which is kind of vital in my opinion.

	Safety should be a primary concern	19	as far as I'm concerned, like, yeah, it's great if they've got their literacy, it's great if they've got their numeracy, but are they safe?
	Saddened by gaps in education, driven to improve outcomes	21	it really saddens me that the reality is that a lot of people (<i>pause</i>) don't, because they either haven't had the correct education or yeah, just, I guess just don't know how because they haven't been taught that.
A right to one's identity	RSE lessons can facilitate a positive environment for self-expression and self-discovery, which is rewarding for Jennifer.	8	we've done a lot around kind of different types of relationships and, and pupil's sort of - we've had peoples realising that they (<i>pause</i>), you know, have feelings too towards maybe the same sex or and, and that I guess those sessions have enabled them to maybe feel a bit more secure about their feelings
	RSE can lead to transformative realisations for students about their own sexuality.	11	We have had pupils coming out, for example, following sessions and that's been a really, you know, big thing for those pupils and they, those pupils have referred directly to stuff they've learned in sessions and kind of said it's made, like you know, it's made them understand themselves more fully and kind of has made lots of things make sense in their in their head.
	Teaching contributes to students' self-understanding and sense of clarity.	12	I guess just, it's just the way they take in the information is always interesting and you can kind of see them making realisations as you teach them stuff.
	Students are fascinated with RSE topics and the novelty of information.	7	<u>they're very</u> engaged by the topic because they're sort of fascinated by it and I guess, maybe prior to the new guidance coming out, they weren't getting as much exposure to this kind of information
Supporting anxiety through change	Holding parental anxiety and concerns, addressing fears and misconceptions	8	When they saw the word 'sex' they completely panicked and thought that I was going to be, you know, teaching the same content to their child as someone who has a much better understanding. So a lot of it was around just reassuring them that this is what the curriculum looks like for this pupil, this learner, and it looks very different to a different learner.

Addressing anxiety and advocating for RSE.	9	there was quite a lot of anxiety from support staff just about like these things being taught to our pupils. So I've had to do quite a lot of work with them as well around like reassuring them about like <u>justifying</u> and explaining <u>why</u> we're teaching these things. So kind of almost similar anxieties to parents in a way, which has been quite interesting
Staff hesitancy reflects challenges of broader societal discomfort with discussing sensitive topics.	10	it can still be a struggle just to get staff to say, like, the correct scientific vocabulary for body parts, for example, out loud. And things like that can be, can be challenging.

STRUGGLING IN ISOLATION: INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS

Subthemes	Experiential Statements	Page number	Quote(s)
	Facing battles alone is overwhelming and daunting.	19	I guess I'd just like there to be more people who are as fired up as I am (<i>laughs</i>), I mean, I'm sure there are, but I just feel a bit like alone in it though, and having to make all these <u>decisions</u> and come up with all these <u>ideas</u> for a whole school, it can be quite overwhelming and daunting.
Feeling alone, seeking connection	Isolated in the struggle to navigate RSE without specialised support networks.	16	I have been put on like training sessions around RSHE, but again I often find that most of the people on the session, in the sessions are either like mainstream teachers or mainstream teachers working in a unit, so they're pupils have much better understanding,
	Holding a barrage of unanswered questions.	17	if you're trying to do it all in your own head it just gets very confusing. You kind of need to be like, can we put this here? Does that make sense? Is there gonna be an issue with that? Because obviously you don't wanna make a whole load of resources and then realise something doesn't quite work?

	Efforts to collaborate with other schools to address common challenges.	15	I have tried to set up like RSHE essentially working parties in the past with other special schools because, like there are <u>so many</u> just complex things that come up
Making subjective decisions without guidance	Hard to decide who will and who won't cover various topics.	3	But it wouldn't be, we wouldn't sit them down and say like, "this is someone having sex," kind of thing. Whereas our formal learners <u>will</u> have, do cover that within their sessions so they'll be learning about kind of the intricacies of sexual relationships and that's been quite a hard decision to make.
	Challenge in determining appropriate content for pupils considering both physical and cognitive age.	2	So most of our pupils are, like cognitively, sort of (<i>pause</i>) we say kind of between 2 to 4 years old even though they're teenagers. So that has been the challenge, has been like figuring out what content pupils need.
	Stuck in an internal grapple with ethical dilemmas in the absence of guidance.	9	an internal struggle in my mind that, I was, I get a bit stuck with is that - and obviously there's no kind of real guidance around this, but you know, if you think about equal opportunities - in an ideal world all of our pupils would have the same information, just provided in a slightly different way, but I just, I mean I've worked on this for such a long time and I just feel there's no way of providing that information in in a different way
	Reflection on the unconventional nature of decision-making in the absence of guidance.	15	I spoke to a kind of sex and relationships <u>expert</u> from the borough who gave me some, advice, but again it's all very like it just feels like very opinion- everyone's just got their <u>opinions</u> on it.

	Navigating ethical dilemmas.	3	obviously the guidance was that all pupils should have equal opportunity access to this, but when we look at our learners and obviously, like I say, cognitively a lot of them are under two years old, really. It just doesn't seem <u>appropriate</u> or <u>relevant</u> to teach them that part of the curriculum at this stage in their lives.
	Constant second-guessing and worry about making the right decisions.	14	you're also always constantly second guessing yourself and worrying like is this - am I definitely doing the right thing?
Is this ethical?	Positioned as an expert, yet grappling with feelings of uncertainty.	19-20	the reality is I'm not an expert on this, I'm just doing the best I can with the resources I've been given with the limited training I've been given on this specific, in this specific topic
	Ethical dilemmas arising from the disparity between empowering students with knowledge while acknowledging the practical barriers they face.	12	I think another really hard part though, about this curriculum for learners with special needs, is that you're teaching them about all of these things, and they have a <u>right</u> to, you know, <u>engage</u> in these things. But the reality is still very different because, you know, so, so many of them lack really <u>any</u> independence. You know, are you always having the back of your mind, like, where are you gonna form these relationships? and what's that actually gonna look like for <u>you</u> as a young person?
	Recognition of the complexities around cognitive and physical age - balancing age-appropriate content with the rights of teenage learners.	9	you wouldn't sit down a 2 year old and talk to them about sexual intercourse because it's just not <u>relevant</u> and – But, but it's a tricky part of it, because obviously I'm aware that a lot of the pupils we have here <u>are</u> teenagers and, you know, have as much of a right to having those feelings and those desires as anyone else. So that's always a bit of a struggle in my mind.

Subthemes	Experiential Statements	Page number	Quote(s)
	Facing unexpected challenges - revisiting the drawing board.	18	one of my pupils was working in the cafe and a person she didn't know came into the cafe and ordered and she just refused to speak to him. And I said "Why are you? Why are you not speaking?" And she was like, "Because it's a person I don't know." And I was like "Oh my gosh. Yeah, of course. Like, you're totally right", so then I'm kind of like, right, go back to the drawing board, look at it again. How do we? How do we adapt this to make it work in <u>this</u> situation? You know, it's like, it's really, you really have to think about everything.
Relationships are complex	Challenge in translating complex and abstract concepts into a structured and concrete form.	19	I guess because the way a lot of them think is <u>so black and white</u> you kind of have to cater to that, through this, through this teaching and it's, that's what's so challenging because it's just obviously relationships aren't black and white.
		4	I would say it's more challenging as a teacher to deliver sessions to those learners because it's still such a complex subject and their understanding is much more limited so it's much more challenging
	Recognising the complexity of RSE issues and providing targeted support.	13	I had a pupil a few years ago who was 16 years old and he was very interested in a pupil who was 13 years old, so I had to do some kind of 1:1 sessions with him around, like <u>consent</u> and understanding kind of the issues with <u>age</u> and yeah, yeah, very individualised to the situation, really.

	While adults expressed some resistance, students were open and accepting of RSE, emphasising the value of neurodivergent thinking.	11	I said, like, you know, if you need to have a laugh about it, that's fine. It might make you feel a bit embarrassed, might make you feel a bit like funny and all these things and they just looked at me like I was completely mad. They just thought it was very, they don't have the same (<i>laughs</i>) social inhibitions that we might have which is a really good thing and like, takes it away from being a big barrier to the education cause they just, they just want to know the information, really, they don't really find it embarrassing or strange, they're just very open.
New perspectives and insights	Sessions with neurodiverse students are consistently intriguing, offering unique insights and perspectives that challenge expectations.	11	I think the way they, I mean obviously like the way their brains work is very, very unique and different. So things that they come out with in those sessions are often different from what I predict they're gonna come out with, which is always interesting.
	Personal connection to students.	20	I just really enjoyed working with the pupils with special needs <u>more</u> than the mainstream kids and also have like learning disabilities myself, I'm dyslexic, dyspraxic and have ADHD. So I sort of feel like I have some level of empathy and understanding with the pupils that I work with.

Janice's PETs

NAVIGATING AMBIGUOUS GUIDANCE			
Subthemes	Experiential Statements	Page number	Quote(s)
Following lacking guidance	Following guidance that doesn't give any guidance	1	it was sort of very much felt by sort of the standard classroom teachers, like myself, and our head of department that actually that guidance didn't give any guidance (<i>laughs</i>) on what to do with our sort of learners. So, we were sort of floundering for a bit I'll be honest.
	Initial panic and concern amidst limited guidance	3	after a sort of a first few months of sort of initial panic and what are we going to do, we sort of wrote our own curriculum based on the guidance

	Guidance, help and support? It was non-existent.	25	The <u>lack</u> of guidance and support from the government, and from anyone in education really, about how to do it successfully with SEN students. It was non-existent. There was no help and support.
	Navigating uncharted waters together.	26	we were all in the same boat, we were all new.
	The idea of more specific guidance is a dream, far from reality.	29	I don't know how feasible that would be, they probably won't bother cause they haven't for anything else. But, you know, you can dream.
	Holding unanswered questions.	1	But we were like, right, what does that actually mean, though? How, you know, we've got this hour blocked on the timetable, but OK, what am I going to do for that hour?
	Even experts not having clear answers.	3	they basically said to us 'crack on, do what you think is best. You know the kids best. Sort of do what you want and hope for the best if Ofsted come in and we'll see what comes from it.'
	Even now teachers cannot access support.	26	On the subject of personal development though, there is none for teachers of SEN to teach this subject <u>even now</u> .
	Concern that oversimplifying complex topics just to tick them off is doing an injustice to their depth and significance	22	So it sort of <u>sometimes</u> felt to me like you were doing a little bit of an injustice because you were like, yeah, I could tick that off, I've taught about gay relationships, but I haven't <u>really</u> taught about gay relationships, <u>really</u> , have I? I've <u>barely scratched the surface</u> .
Have I done it right?	Experience is subjective – how do I know I'm doing the right thing?	26	Because obviously experience is subjective, and you know, until someone comes in and says, sort of like Ofsted but not really Ofsted, but whether you're doing a good job or not, or you know, you've got some sort of standardised <u>reference</u> , how do you actually know as a teacher?

	Balancing student needs with curriculum standards creates a level of doubt in competence.	22	. And as much as you, like I say, you can tick it off, highlight it, say yes, I have technically taught that, but because you're not explicitly teaching whatever that specific bullet point says, you sort of almost feel a bit like, oh, God, have I done that right? Have I done it justice?
	Left with lingering uncertainty despite external validation.	3	But I did read the Ofsted report and it was highlighted in the Ofsted report for that school, that they were happy with their personal social, emotional development education that included the implementation of the new RSE framework. So, I take from that, that it was OK? <i>(laughs)</i>
	Remember to be kind to yourself	22	So, with that understanding of that, so actually I've done great job there. You know, sort of be kind to yourself on that front
	Recognising your efforts.	22	But I've done it, you then have to remind yourself, I've done it enough to a level that <u>my</u> children can understand.
	Seeking peer support amidst no support. Peer support creates the biggest and most meaningful breakthroughs.	27	what is <u>really useful</u> post-course is the networking events... Because it's often through those discussions as a teacher, regardless of the subject, you make your most breakthroughs and you make your most meaningful changes to your practice.
Filling the gaps	Seeking certainty through CPD.	26	it would be oversold, oversubscribed, <u>all</u> SEN teachers would jump on that because none of us have had any actual real official training on delivering RSE. We all do general safeguarding training as teachers, but actually if you're teaching that subject, maybe some specific training would be good
		33	actually.

	Comparing notes.	23	So, you know, my partner teacher, who taught the other equivalent of the year 9 class, we'd absolutely compare notes. And again, we tried to teach our lesson at the same time as each other as well, so that after and prior, but particularly after, we could almost have a debrief on a Thursday after school and be like, how did that go for you? What misconceptions did your kids have? Did mine have the same, etcetera, etcetera. What worked well for you?
	Seeking external reassurance.	3	But at the very least, they could look over it as an external person and kick off where we were meeting the guidance from a statutory point of view, which was was you know, reassuring.
	Value on learning from teachers who have been there and done it. Shared understanding.	28	So doing that with your colleagues, that you know, you know they aren't making that up, you know that they're not, you know, saying it for the sake of it. They've been there, they've done that.
	Supportive school system bridged the gaps left by the broader system.	25-26	I was really fortunate to work at a great school with a great team, with people that, one: Came up with great ideas and supported you. But, two: You know, gave me the freedom. I was a very free teacher in that school. They trusted me to go with an idea and run with it. And if it worked, it worked. If it didn't, then you would pull it back and try something else.
Evidence overshadowing RSE	Pressure to provide physical evidence. A need for proof.	5-6	they were keen for us to try and get a little bit more sort of <u>evidence</u> of learning and obviously not writing, our students aren't capable of writing, but a bit more sort of, yeah, evidence... I suppose we could just have said we were doing it and we weren't -cause it's very talk based.
	Systemic panic around accountability having a detrimental impact on students learning.	7	but again, the computer saved it once they've done it and it was just, more I think because we were in that Ofsted window, it's a bit more panic from powers that be that actually if anyone did question it, there was that bit of evidence, so to speak, which sort of changed our approach a little bit, I think, <u>potentially</u> to the detriment of the students.

Focusing on evidence overshadows the real purpose of RSE.	9	So, when we did then move to the things where we had to have the <u>evidence</u> , although I say worksheets they were Velcro ones, the engagement definitely slipped a little bit, like I say, because we were using, you know, 10 minutes of a 30 minute lesson to do those Velcro stick things, which was 10 minutes less of role play or scenario based stuff. So I think that didn't <u>help</u> particularly.
Evidence and accountability overshadowing the purpose of RSE.	14	Those four slightly higher ability students, some of them were able to type, with assistive technology or text to speech, so I could get a bit more of their response <u>recorded</u> out of them.

EMOTIONAL LOADS

Subthemes	Experiential Statements	Page number	Quote(s)
Ready and resilient: Navigating safeguarding concerns	High risk of safeguarding concerns	29	you're probably more likely to have sort of safeguarding concerns and, you know, a lot of things ended up being recorded as cpoms or safeguarding concerns from <u>our</u> lessons
	Safeguarding happens right there and then.	31	it's specifically teaching RSE or PSHE are the two lessons where you, you know, if they're gonna come up <u>in a lesson</u> , tend to be when those things come up
	RSE opens a space for safeguarding to come up.	30	I think you know, you are sort of technically opening yourself up a bit more to that in that situation and then specifically with SEN students, like I say, because they're gonna do the reaction or the response <u>when</u> you mentioned the thing, because they don't have the ability to delay or hide it or whatever.
	Putting yourself in an emotionally vulnerable position.	31	you could really be opening yourself up to, you know, a heavy session so to speak, and if you haven't necessarily clocked onto that prior this session as well, it could really hit you like a ton of bricks

	Unrealistic nature of acting as though a disclosure hasn't affected you.	30-31	a lot of that lesson would be taken up with things that I would legally have to then do something about, you know, disclose and actually how do you then go on to your next period and go right, history now guys it's fine, like?
	A need to make space for decompression.	15	15 minutes of actually sort of just playing, decompression, especially for that higher ability group I'd always have those first, so they had that additional 15 minutes after with support staff to address any feelings that may have come up.
	Sudden switch from emotionally heavy subject to academic, unemotional topics.	15	you're like, well, hang on a minute, we've just been talking about like sex and we're now on to like numbers to ten.
	Staff providing emotional, almost therapeutic, support for students.	15	the one girl, she may end up in that 15 minutes, taking herself away to sensory room, or asking to speak to a specific member of staff, because a few of the things may have brought up feelings for her and difficult emotions
Balancing teacher and student wellbeing	Knowing your students and prioritising their needs and wellbeing.	16	interestingly, the students with more issues around their own self-esteem tend to find it more difficult to talk about those things, which I suppose you know is natural and understandable. So, like I said, the specific planning of teaching that group first and making that decompression provision available after was really important
	Always aware of triggers during sensitive discussions.	16	you know, strong emotions could lead to challenging behaviour. So again, it's really important you got those familiar staff that would know the triggers and the signs and then how to deal with it.
	Five minutes to put on your brave face and carry on.	31	you're just going about your day teaching and then suddenly you're like, wow. OK. You know, and hopefully if you're working in a nice school where you've got support around, you'd be able to, you know, step out for five or whatever. But, the reality is there isn't always the facility to do that so you've just gotta carry on as the teacher. You know, you have to just put on that brave face and carry on, you've got your next lesson to do...

Facing emotionally distressing days alone. Burning out from the weight of holding emotional challenges alone.	31	where do teachers go? You know, we don't have supervision. You know, like therapists, social workers, we don't have sort of really debrief time. You might be able to talk to a member of staff in your school. I was very lucky that I could speak to my co-teacher about stuff. But if you don't, you're taking that home with you then, you're taking it with you and that's on your shoulders then, so to speak.
Making the space to feel and protect your own wellbeing.	30	If I'd had a cohort of 10 that were particularly safeguarding heavy... I know I would have really struggled to have taught that half an hour lesson and then gone straight into maths.
Lack of structures to support teachers causing confidentiality lapses to safeguard their own mental health.	33	you've got no supervision or necessarily any time to decompress. It's human nature. You know, you've just dealt with something quite heavy. You wanna sort of offload, get it out, sort yourself out.

CREATING A CULTURE OF BELONGING

Subthemes	Experiential Statements	Page number	Quote(s)
	Nice to find avenues to teach students about difference.	4	looking at differences because the extended family aren't pigs, they're <u>other</u> animals. But it was quite nice to link to, you know, not all humans look the same, go on to talking about then skin colour etcetera, etcetera.
Embracing difference	Important to cover difference in RSE.	10	we were very lucky enough to have a a gay couple coming to school, that was like a friend of a member of staff. Again, just trying to expose the children to (<i>pause</i>) other forms of relationships.
	SEN students are more accepting of difference than mainstream students, due to awareness of difference within themselves.	10	having worked with mainstream students and SEN students, SEN students themselves are a lot more accepting of anything that's slightly different because they are often aware of themselves that they're perceived as being different.

Creating an inclusive learning environment promotes self-confidence and positive self-perception among students	11	We did a lot of stuff around (<i>pause</i>) not just being physically attracted to someone, you know, what other qualities do people have that makes them attractive? And we looked at like, you know, if someone's really smart, funny, etcetera, it might not necessarily matter that they they only have one arm, etcetera, because <u>actually</u> it's not just about how they look. And again, for our slightly more able students who were perhaps aware of their own differences, they were really receptive to that because they knew
Encouraging students to value themselves beyond superficial standards.	11	we had like one girl who was like, “oh, I know I'm in a wheelchair, miss. So, maybe someone would think the same about me, cause I've still got a really nice personality.” And you're like, absolutely, that's exactly the point we're trying to get across.
Struck by SEN students acceptance of difference.	17	how struck I was with my kids acceptance of it. They were almost not bothered, in that they were just, like, great two men like each other, brilliant. Okay, crack on.
Personal reflections on the complexity of understanding relationships as a neurodivergent individual.	2	The relationship path is particularly difficult for students with ASD or who are on the spectrum because obviously an inherent difficulty for them is relationships and understanding relationships and how they can be perceived, etcetera. And this was something I was quite apprehensive about delivering myself, being autistic myself as a teacher, and because I can discuss sort of relationships on paper, you know, this is a platonic relationship, this is a romantic relationship. But actually my personal experience maybe different from sort of what it's expected to be taught, so to speak.
Students have an awareness of difference, discrimination and prejudice.	19	what he was trying to ask was like, ‘Do you get bullied? Does anyone say anything mean to you?’, because we'd really highlighted that technically they're different being two men as opposed to a man and a woman.

	Teaching about difference in RSE facilitates a greater culture of belonging and self-acceptance.	24	The acceptance, the understanding and the awareness of the sort of key themes and if there's personal experience that can be linked to, obviously, that's <u>great</u> as well. And because, you know, it gives your children a sense of belonging as well, in society.
	Disappointment in mainstream students lack of tolerance for difference.	17	if I'd have just brought a gay adult couple into a classroom of 30 children, at least half of them would be <u>losing their minds</u> , making inappropriate comments, having something to say
	Struggle to align guidance with students lived experiences.	12	the model scheme of work, sorry - said one of the lessons was like oh, 'think about time you've been in a relationship or a situation...', you know my kids couldn't do that. They've got no idea. They had never done it or they haven't got the ability to reflect on something like that
Keeping it relevant, reducing dissonance	No point in covering irrelevant topics. Risk of distressing students if topics are too far removed.	13	What would be the point? You're probably more likely to make them distressed by, you know, bringing in an idea to them that, you know, things like erections can happen for boys because as much as it's a natural part for most teenage boys to start experimenting, playing with themselves, having those experiences you know from sort of 13 onwards, for our children <u>that isn't happening</u> . You know, most of them are still wearing nappies, unable to control their own bladder, relying on personal care for everything, so they're not having those private moments.
	RSE has the potential to cause more harm than good.	13	some of the slightly more (<i>pause</i>) reflective students and students with anxiety would then be thinking, well, I don't do that. Am I weird? Am I missing out?
	Not wanting students to feel abnormal.	13	some students with autism, would get quite freaked out that it hadn't happened to them or they hadn't had that experience, and then it would become a whole thing of like, why has this not happened to me?

Wanting students to feel accepted and included. Dissonances risk making students feel more different.	18	looked then at, like, say, you know, adoption, different types of family. And I think actually that would have been really key, knowing that some of our children were in local authority care and fostered and adopted, because it's making that link to <u>their</u> life.
Cautious not to confuse or overwhelm students.	21	we didn't want to sort of make it <u>too</u> confusing

INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Subthemes	Experiential Statements	Page number	Quote(s)
	Curiosity around LAC's openness and ability to access RSE.	7	What we found actually quite interesting was, sort of the students that (<i>pause</i>) may be involved in safeguarding or child protection, may be involved in local authority care, have support from our school social worker, etcetera, were a lot more <u>open</u> and a <u>lot more</u> (<i>pause</i>) willing, a lot more able to, in their own way, discuss experiences and discuss feelings around relationships, around expectations, around things.
	Students who hadn't been exposed to RSE denied opportunities to develop vital skills. Ja8	8	I think that showed actually a massive <u>gap</u> in the provision, because that's obviously come from additional work they do with people like counsellors and therapists and social services. And actually, some of the students that live a life that doesn't involve any of that external input, were almost very closed and guarded to discussing things like relationships with their parents, relationships with peers, because I think they didn't know how to. That because that explicit instruction has never been there, in those topics. So I think in that sense, actually, the guidance and the implementation of this in the curriculum is actually vital, especially for our students because all of them <u>need</u> to be able to communicate that.

Students engagement skyrocketed once they were given the opportunity to access RSE.	8	once we sort of got over that hurdle, of how to use the right tools to do the talking, so we, you know, looking at like emotions, fans, specific PECS and symbols for that, that are relevant to the topic, etcetera, engagement, you know, skyrocketed because they were able to
Students being able to finish education with greater equality in outcomes.	29	actually if they gave a guidance for SEN students that by 19, when most of them leave education, there were sort of these outcomes.

WHAT WORKS

Subthemes	Experiential Statements	Page number	Quote(s)
Knowing your students	Staff-student relationships are key.	14	it comes with a bit with experience of knowing those specific kids.
	Using familiar interests to support students engagement.	4	We tried to tie it in where possible to things like familiar traditional tales or familiar interests of the children. So we used Peppa Pig a lot. <u>Big</u> interest of the children
	Taking the time to understand students allowed Janice to provide RSE that they loved and adored	8	the role play where they thought they'd <u>hurt</u> me, or things like that, making them feel like they'd really contributed to the lesson they absolutely adored. it was getting into the niche of their interests.
	Value on the relationship and rapport between students and familiar staff members.	16	Whenever we taught RSE or PSHE we made sure that it was our core class staff that were in, so I'd never time table that lesson for other staff to do. For example, if I was on my PPA, I would never get a cover teacher to teach that lesson. I would never do that lesson if I had a support staff member off, ill or away, and we had supply in.

	RSE is fun and enjoyable when made accessible	6	we did a lot of role play like that, got a lot of things like trying to get the children to, like, pretend to have a fight with Miss XX and then they'd get a reward from the other TA. And it was like ohh, but was it OK that Miss XX's now on the floor crying – I was fine – just like it was an example, which they obviously loved (laughs). They thought that was great because, you know, they thought that actually really hurt me and that was brilliant.
Bringing RSE to life	Bringing RSE to life.	11	And then we made like sensory bottles based on that, like 'butterflies in your tummy' feeling for being attracted to someone
	Profound questions posed by students indicates their openness and curiosity to RSE.	18	he was able to ask through support, through his TA, "Can you have babies?" Now, he didn't have the understanding of the <u>sexual</u> part but he knew that a man and a lady could normally end up producing a baby, and it came out the ladies tummy. So he'd made that link that they're both two men, so can the baby come out of a man's tummy?
A safe and secure space	RSE must be a safe space, free of judgement.	16	you really needed that safe space and those, you know that that environment where it was OK and they knew they weren't being judged and etcetera
	Whatever it takes to help students feel safe and secure.	17	to try and keep that sort of <u>familiarity and safety</u> aspect for the kids, they felt safe and secure in that's what they were doing, those were that adults that would be in the room when it was happening, and it was OK that whatever happened, happened.

Danielle's PETS

A RIGHT TO RSE			
Subtheme	Experiential statements	Page number	Quote(s)
A necessary challenge	A necessary challenge	1	it's one of the most <u>important</u> areas to teach... but it is also one of the (laughs) hardest areas to teach as well

	Difficult in many ways	1	it's that those emotions and feelings that they're going through, which can quite often result in them displaying certain behaviours, makes it even more difficult to teach that kind of content
	Most challenging, most important.	2	The reason that's one of our strands is, as I said, it's one of the biggest areas that we know our young people find the most difficult.
	RSE is always relevant and benefits everyone.	4	some of it is actually relevant for all, even though one young person isn't necessarily demonstrating the same behaviours as another, we're aware that potentially you know, things like exploring your body is something that they do tend to go through, especially when they're coming into puberty. So although it will benefit one in particular, it potentially will benefit the whole class as well.
	We need to do what we can to get them ready to go.	19	we recognise that the opportunities when they leave [school name] are so limited and there's so much that they need to be able to know and so much need to be able to do to have the best quality of life.
	Wanting to take on responsibility and doing the best you can.	19	No, no, I'm gonna deal with it. It's happening in my classroom. I'm gonna look at it, and I'm gonna deal with it as best as I can.
	Helping students understand what's happening to them.	1	it's so important to explain what's happening to them and try to kind of make it as <u>real</u> as possible
The right to safe exploration	Students should be supported to exercise their rights in a safe way.	4	we'll plan it with the parents as well and try to come to some kind of an arrangement to allow that young person to <u>explore</u> , the way they should be able to explore, but also trying to teach them about the time and the place and, you know, what's done in society (<i>laughs</i>) and what isn't.

	Students should be allowed to exercise their rights safely.	5	we talk about things that we can do to allow that young person to manage how they're feeling, to explore themselves <u>safely</u> and understand those feelings
	Balancing parental views with students rights and autonomy.	6	we are trying to kind of get them to see that it's healthy and it's something that you <u>should</u> explore if your child is showing you they want to be close to somebody, but it's about being <u>safe</u> as well
	Sexual behaviour isn't shameful in itself, it's just about safety.	20	Not that we want him to be stripping all the time and removing his clothing, but I think we've got to take it with what we've been doing is taking him somewhere private and trying to get him to understand that actually, if you want private time, you can't just remove all your clothing and tear everything off in class.
	Giving students a voice gives them the right to say no.	7	that doesn't mean that if they're not comfortable at a certain point that personal care is happening, or they want somebody else, or it's somebody completely unfamiliar, that they shouldn't be voicing, they shouldn't be saying actually this is wrong. I'm not, I don't want this.
The right to be heard	Giving students the knowledge and skills to speak up and protect themselves.	8	The difficulty there is, is that the majority of our pupils are non-verbal or at the really early stages of language, so although we're exposing them to this language, it's how we get them to be able to use that language if they needed to talk about something that is potentially happening to them.
	Self-expression is crucial.	9	You can ask them, there's feeling section, there's opinions within those books. So you could talk to them about different parts of their body, and you could talk, you could then ask them how they're feeling, you could ask them opinions, you know, there's lots of different ways of, kind of conversing about the body and what's happening to the body.
	Opening the doors to infinite communication.	10	We believe that if we can teach them yes and no and, a really <u>good</u> way of responding to yes and no then, oh we can ask them infinite questions.

RSE supports students to protect themselves	11-12	obviously our children, our pupils here are <u>so vulnerable</u> and if we can teach them to be able to, to kind of come forward if something has happened as well as teaching them obviously how to manage relationships, and be amongst people, and foster healthy relationships, you know?
The student was heard	13	although there was no <u>specifics</u> about who or where, they were very much like it still needs to be explored, we still need to do a piece of work, we still need to think about, you know, what might have happened even if we can't get the answers
The student wasn't heard. They didn't understand	14	She was then expected to repeat what she'd told, but within 10 days' time, that information was not as clear as what she said on that day and then I was told that "it's not clear whether something's happened, so we're not going to take it further."
The real life impact of RSE.	11-12	she did actually tell us that somebody had touched her and she was able to say where she'd been touched, and that it was somewhere private. She did understand. It's those things that- that's why it's so important, isn't it?
Not taking RSE seriously leaves students at risk.	8	not using words like penis and vagina <u>again</u> can leave them really vulnerable because, they may, their parents might use a pet name for their penis and they don't understand, and then they can't articulate if something has happened.

TRYING TO DO THE BEST WE CAN

Subtheme	Experiential statements	Page number	Quote(s)
We're doing our best	Doing our best.	2	as a starting point they think about we try to group our students as best as we can

	Knowing that you've done the best you can.	15	I would know that I tried my very best to reach out to as many people as I could and escalate it to the managers and make sure that somebody was listening to my concerns so I could say that I'd done everything that I could possibly do.
	There's always a next step. We can't give up.	16	we'll talk about it between us all and just make sure that we're, A) all aware and, B) kind of sharing potential problem solving ideas you know, thinking about what to do next.
	Making the space to solve challenges.	17	we'll have like a focus and we'll talk about, right, what, what are we finding difficult around the areas of independence? What's our challenges? What can we embed further? What do we need to tweak? What do we need to look at? And we'll try and problem solve in that way.
	A culture of investment and understanding	18	it's working in an environment where <u>everybody</u> is so <u>invested</u> in these young people and their development.
	RSE is everybody's responsibility	18	<u>Everybody</u> in that class that is coming into contact with that young person is thinking about that issue, <u>everybody</u> is thinking about how we can address it.
	Everybody wants the best.	19	it just comes from a working environment where everybody just wants the best for the students, so they'll take that time out.
	Trying our best	26	it's just lots of trying and seeing if we can get to the root of it and putting things in place to distract or diffuse, deescalate and help regulate.
Are we doing enough?	Navigating uncertainty whilst striving for the best.	10	it's difficult <u>sometimes</u> , not with all of our learners, but with some of our learners to <u>really know</u> when you're asking them a question if that yes and no response is a <u>true</u> reflection of what they're thinking and how they're feeling.

Laugh the worry away.	12	Very stressful (<i>laughs</i>). You worry all the time.
There's only so much you can do.	12	it's just knowing that potentially something has happened to her and that we can't explore it, although it's been passed on and it's been dealt with, with the right people, it's knowing in the back of your mind that potentially we might never know what has happened because she couldn't articulate it, and even though we tried <u>lots</u> of different ways to get her to think about where and who, she wasn't able to do so.
You know that you can't protect them all the time.	13	it weighs down on you because you, you know that you can't protect them all the time
A need to offload worries.	16	we'll look at a particular case and talk through everything that's been done and then I can just share any worries that I've still got about that case and we can think about anything else that I could potentially do.
Wanting to know more.	16	I'll try and go on as much training as I can
No experts, no answers.	23	And there's no real kind of, I suppose experts... you have got a PSHE / RSE one but it's very mainstream focused and she can't quite give me the answers
Not knowing if you're doing the right thing.	25	t's really challenging to separate the behaviour as whether it's the diagnosis or whether it's the, whether it's to do with hormones or, you know, and it's it, it's knowing what that behaviour is essentially where that the function of that behaviour, where that behaviour is coming from
Not knowing if you're doing enough.	26	are we doing enough to really unpick where that came from in the first place?

	Frustration with adult services for not sharing an understanding.	14	the rules for the for our young people when they move into adult services are as if they <u>are</u> adults, but they are not- although they are adults within <u>age</u> ; cognitively, developmentally, they are <u>not</u> adults and that's not always taken into consideration when dealing with issues that have come up and that's the thing that I find the most frustrating, I would say.
	Fighting losing battles.	15	I've tried to take it further and it it's, I've got it and I've got all this, potentially for some of our people's, historical information and it's not being listened to.
	Horrified to see student's voices ignored.	15	I actually had one social worker say to me, "well, they haven't disclosed anything, so there's nothing I can do until they disclose" and that shocked me to the core
No one is helping	Isolated in the struggle to navigate RSE without specialised support networks	17	I have been put on like training sessions around RSHE, but again I often find that most of the people on the session, in the sessions are either like mainstream teachers or mainstream teachers working in a unit, so their pupils have much better understanding
	Complete disconnect from students realities.	15	I was like if you are expecting any of our students to say, you know openly, this is what happened and this is what happened then you- it's <u>impossible</u> . They are disclosing, they're disclosing through their behaviour.
	Not many people outside of the system who understand.	23	I've joined the [local authority name] RSE network and they meet regularly, but there's not many special schools that are in that network. So although I'm having conversations, it's really difficult to, and I'm meeting with other leads from other lots of other discussions and the focus that they're having isn't quite the same as what I need here.
	Having to figure it out on our own.	24	We're having to devise it very much ourselves.

ITS ALWAYS DIFFERENT

Subtheme	Experiential statements	Page number	Quote(s)
	Every child is different and so RSE is always different	1	it's taught differently in every class, as is most of our learning here, because each class, although we're a school for young people with complex and profound needs, and they <u>all do</u> have complex and profound needs, they are <u>all</u> completely different
	It's always different. There is no one answer.	2	ultimately the way it's taught in one class and the key messages that are put in one class are different from another class and different from another class because each class's needs are are different and their ability to understand is different.
	Recognising that rigid structures may not always accommodate the dynamic nature of the students they support.	3	but there's quite often ad hoc planning going on as well because we'll have young people that are presenting with things like wanting to explore their bodies, but wanting to explore their bodies <u>openly</u> and there's lots of teaching that then has to be done about public and private. Or we'll have young people that are struggling, maybe starting their periods or struggling with their <u>emotions</u> and, I suppose it's tweaked as well depending on what's being presented
	Depends on the student and class needs.	21	it's tweaked depending on what's happening in the class and how much of whatever that class needs?
	Every child is different.	25	I suppose the other added layer to that, is our pupils here have got dual diagnosis like they've got, you know they've got multiple things

Appendix N – Mapping Personal Experiential Themes (PETs) onto Group Experiential Themes (GETs)

	A: RSE IS VITAL	B: IMPLEMENTING AMBIGUOUS GUIDANCE	C: CARRYING EMOTIONAL LOADS	D: SEEKING SUPPORT IN SOLITUDE	E: WORKING WITH DIVERSE MINDS
Rosie	<p>LEAVING THE NEST: PREPARING FOR ADULTHOOD</p> <p>Transitioning into the unknown</p>	<p>HARD TO KNOW: MAKING DECISIONS WITHOUT GUIDANCE</p> <p>Making ambiguous decisions amid ambiguous guidance</p> <p>Am I doing the right thing?</p> <p>TENSION SURROUNDING LABELS</p> <p>EMBRACING CHANGE</p> <p>Embracing authenticity over uniformity</p> <p>Adapting to new approaches</p>	<p>Letting them go</p>	<p>Strength in connections</p>	<p>RETHINKING RSE IN NEURODIVERSE EDUCATION</p> <p>LIGHT HEARTED APPROACHES</p> <p>Navigating neurodiversity</p> <p>Reflective growth</p>

Jennifer	<p>A core component</p> <p>A right to one's identity</p> <p>Supporting anxiety through change</p> <p>ADVOCATING FOR INCLUSIVE AND EMPOWERING RSE</p>	<p>Making subjective decisions without guidance</p> <p>Is this ethical?</p>	EMOTIONAL LOADS	<p>Overlooked and forgotten</p> <p>STRUGGLING IN ISOLATION: INTERNAL CONFLICTS AND ETHICAL DILEMMAS</p> <p>Feeling alone, seeking connection</p>	<p>WORKING WITH UNIQUE MINDS</p> <p>Relationships are complex</p> <p>New perspectives and insights</p>
Janice	<p>INEQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY</p>	<p>NAVIGATING AMBIGUOUS GUIDANCE</p> <p>Following lacking guidance</p> <p>Have I done it right?</p> <p>Evidence overshadowing RSE</p>	<p>Ready and resilient: Navigating safeguarding concerns</p> <p>Balancing teacher and student wellbeing</p>	Filling the gaps	<p>CREATING A CULTURE OF BELONGING</p> <p>Embracing difference</p> <p>Keeping it relevant, reducing dissonance</p>
Danielle	<p>A RIGHT TO RSE</p> <p>A necessary challenge</p> <p>The right to safe exploration</p>		<p>Are we doing enough?</p>	No one is helping	<p>ITS ALWAYS DIFFERENT</p> <p>TRYING TO DO THE BEST WE CAN</p> <p>We're doing our best</p>

The right to be heard
