

# IN THE MIX



#STOP  
ASIAN HATE

## (Re)starting out

I was incredibly lucky to take part in the RSE professional learning programme this year which has really reignited my passion for RSE. Over the past few months I've been working with a group of Year 8s transforming RSE in our school (hopefully!). It's my view that pupils are already exposed to a tsunami of false and damaging ideas and information about RSE that reinforce the negative messages and stereotypes that they encounter in the world around them. We have a duty, I think, to provide young people with a healthy counter narrative but at the start of this project I wasn't sure what that healthy counter narrative should be. I thought it was really important to listen to young people and understand their experiences of the world they are growing up in – which is very different from the one that I grew up in. I wanted to listen to them and find out what they want to learn and what RSE means to them.

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### School

Secondary school.

### Creative audit participants

68 young people (Year 8).

### Creative audit activities

Recipe book project: Ingredients – Whose in the mix?, Mixture – What jars you? Creative group project – what do you want to learn in RSE?

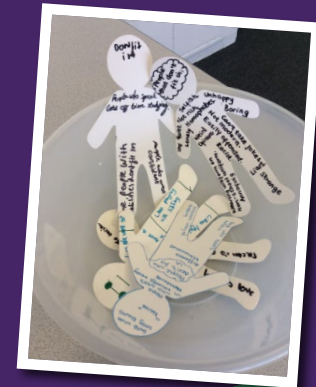
### Making RSE Matter

Inside Out; What Makes a Good Friend?



My real dream is to have RSE embedded across the whole curriculum – be it in maths looking at the percentage of money spent on tax on sanitary products or in physics looking at different forces in relationships – but I realise that that will not happen overnight. So this recipe book project is my starting point.

We started with the ingredients and did some activities around who makes up our school. We had two mixing bowls at the front of the room. Young people each had little cardboard people that they used to write down all the different people that make up our school. Young people had to place their figures in a certain bowl if they thought they fitted into our school and the other bowl if they thought they didn't fit in. Then we discussed why some people fit in and others don't and what we can do to make our school a better place and more inclusive for everyone.



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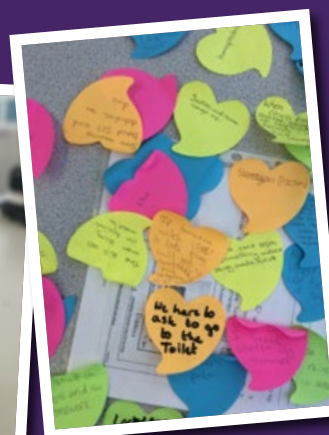
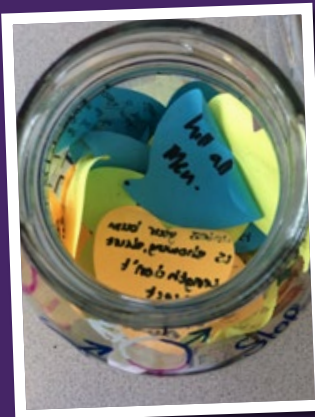
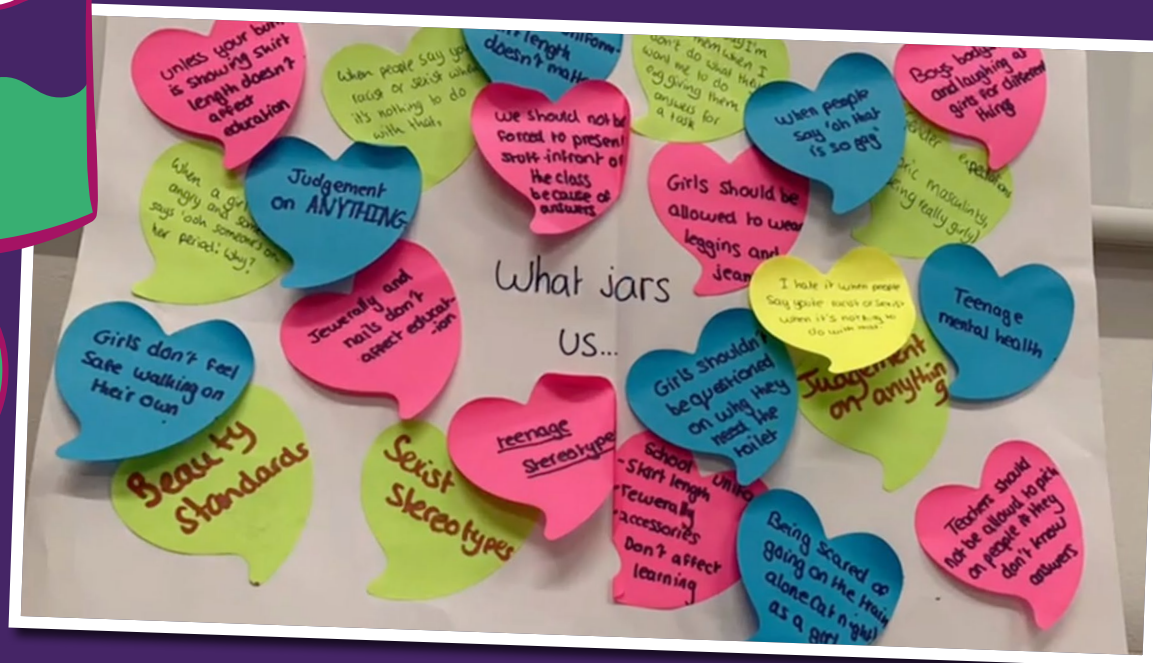


## The MIXTURE: What would young people like to learn?

Then we moved on to the mixture of the recipe book that each class will have published and produced for them. So I spent some time with pupils looking at the forthcoming changes to the RSE curriculum. We went through the different RSE themes, unpicking them so that young people understood what the new curriculum is trying to achieve. Did they like the new curriculum? Did they not like it? Do they think everything they need to learn is everything included in there? What matters to them? What is important in their lives? How do they view the world?

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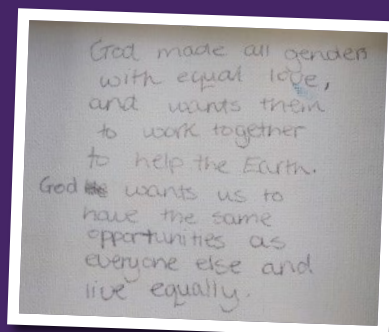
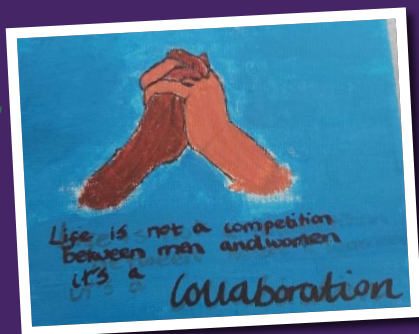
We also did an activity called **What jars you?** which was an opportunity for young people to write down all the things that 'jar', worry, anger or concern them about RSE, sex and relationships. They decorated their jars with messages about what they would like to change in the world, or in our school.





Then I divided pupils into groups. I gave the groups some time to get to know each other and get to work together and then I invited them to produce something that lets me know what they want to learn about in RSE, what's important to them and how they experience the world. I said that it could be absolutely anything – a piece of art, a video, music, it could be anything.

And young people have made things. They've done art work. One of them is composing a full on orchestral movement, I've got raps, I've got videos. I've got all sorts – all trying to make me understand what they want to learn about and in the context of the world that they experience. I've got some time on an INSET day and I've gone for the theme of **voices** and I'm going to show the staff what the pupils have produced so that the rest of my colleagues can also have the chance to listen to what young people have to say.

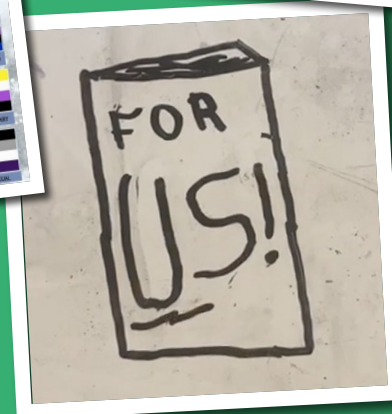


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## The outcome – cooking up the RSE curriculum

The outcome – which would ordinarily be a nice cake – will be a scheme of work based on what young people have said they want to learn. This will be what I deliver to them in year 9.

Young people have designed the covers for the recipe books themselves and inside I'll put everything I've learnt from them and the scheme of work that I'll create based on what I've learnt.







# — RECIPE —

## A summary of what I've learnt so far:

- Young people want qualified teachers and specialist providers delivering RSE. All other subjects are taught by specialists, so RSE should be too.
- Young people want all teachers to be trained in RSE, regardless of whether they are going to be delivering it. They can see that teachers don't know how to challenge certain comments and behaviours. Sexist language and the use of the word "gay" in the playground goes unchallenged as teachers seem unaware or unsure what to do.
- Young people want to be involved in the lessons and want to feel safe to ask questions. They want to help navigate where the lessons go and what they contain to make it more relevant to them.
- Young people want a recognition that all relationships are equal. They want lessons that challenge discrimination throughout the school and promote equality for all pupils of all genders and sexualities. Young people described the school as heteronormative, from examples in text books, to what's on the classroom walls. For example, in the design tech sewing room, all the images on the walls are of girls in fashion. There's a boy in my class who wants to be a fashion designer and he says he feels depressed every time he walks into that classroom.
- Young people want more RSE lessons. At the moment there isn't enough time to cover all of the complicated subjects that they need to learn or all the information and skills they need to learn.
- We are concentrating on the wrong things. Yes, sex is important, young people said, but they want to know how to handle relationships and how to behave and what's normal and all of that first. They want it to be a spiral curriculum where it moves on each time.
- Young people want to discuss and be taught how to understand the ways in which our friends, the media, religion can shape the way we understand relationships and sex. They feel angry about how the media in particular portrays certain relationships and bodies and leaves out others. For example, they said you'd never have a gay love island and how sex scenes in hollywood movies are all the same body type and you never see anyone disabled.
- RSE needs to consider all different experiences and needs, including special educational needs and disabilities.
- Young people need RSE that makes sense to the real issues they face, and it needs to be adapted if those needs change.
- Young people want parents to be involved and they want parents to have more understanding of what the world is like for them.

# Learning through listening

During all the sessions I've run this term, above all, I have just listened to young people and I have also learnt so much. I just sat there and listened and they spoke and I've been aware of things I had no clue about.

For example, there was a young muslim pupil who stayed behind to tell me she doesn't feel that she fits into the school because its in our planners that they have to wear dark / black headscarves, whereas the other kids can come to school with different hair cuts, hair styles and everything else. And that's how she expresses herself, through her headscarves and she showed me pictures of her wardrobe at home with all her beautiful headscarves in. So I was able to take that information to the head and say, you know it says this in the uniform policy – is there any way we can get that removed? And now that's been removed and she came in last week with the most beautiful headscarf on and everybody's been really positive towards her and she's just so much happier.

**When I think I'm doing a good job I'm suddenly taken aback by what they tell me and I realise – 'ok I need to rethink this'. #rethinkthis**

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For example, the internet. They have got internet safety coming out of their ears, but in reality it does not relate to their lives. Yes, internet safety is important but they want the skills to know how to deal with what they see and what they get sent. Most of the unwanted content they receive is from their friends and they are not going to report their friends to the police and as much as they don't want to receive that content, they also don't want to lose their friend. So they need more than how to report malicious content. They need the skills and the power to deal with that themselves. So it's about saying – 'do you know if you share an image of yourself that you're not happy with that you can put a digital hashtag on that image now to stop that image from being shared anywhere on the internet?' Or there's a great app by Childline called Zipit which gives them back the power of being able to combat messages they get by giving them little memes to send back. There's loads of different ways to handle these experiences.

It's unbelievable how much I have learnt from just listening. I have learnt that they are excited about relationships and life and then it suddenly gets quashed. I have also learnt that RSE has to change quite frequently and it has got to adapt and be flexible because the pupils' needs change and because sometimes things happen, and we need to address those things.

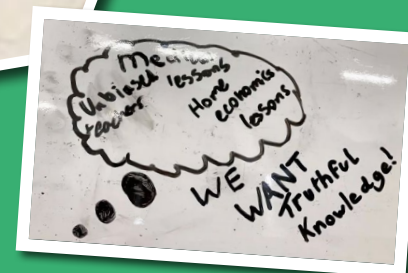
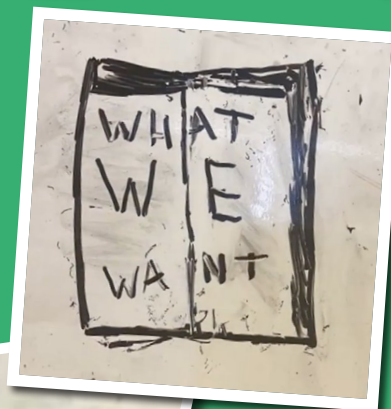


## RSE is back

My long term aim is to collaborate with pupils, parents and local communities to ensure that RSE is embedded across all curriculum areas and that staff are upskilled through high quality whole staff training. In the short term I want to co-produce a spiral curriculum that is meaningful and have this embedded in year 8 by September 2021.

Things are already  
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Things are already changing at our school. Our head is listening. He has put RSE back on the timetable for year 10 and 11 and I have my old job back as RSE lead. I've started interviewing for RSE champions who are going to work with me to bring about the changes needed. We are going to use the screens all around the school to convey all sorts of positive messages relating to each of the RSE themes we will be covering. We've got positive posters going up on the walls and the head wants whole staff training to change the culture in the school. It's exciting times for us.



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