



# Sex education – how it’s taught in other countries

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**N**FER recently completed research to see how other countries tackle the difficult question of how, what and when to teach children in sex and relationships education (SRE). The research covered 17 countries or states – Victoria in Australia, British Columbia in Canada, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Korea, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Scotland, Singapore, Sweden and Switzerland.

In nearly every country, sex and relationships education is included in the curriculum – although usually as part of a larger subject area, for example Physical and Mental Health in Hungary. Until recently, SRE was not part of the curriculum in Japan – students received ‘purity education’ instead, though limited content on SRE has since been introduced in Health and Physical Education.

The age that schools start teaching SRE varies, with some countries starting as young as four (Ireland) or six (Norway) and others, including Finland and Japan, delaying it by several years. During primary education, SRE in general focuses on relationships and the development of the human body – sex education itself is introduced as children get older. For example, Portuguese primary children learn about bodies, gender differences and the

concept of families. As students mature, curriculum content becomes more sophisticated: in Norway, for example, 12–13 year-olds learn about diversity in sexual orientation.

In many countries, individual schools have discretion to decide how to interpret national (or state) standards for SRE. In the Netherlands, national targets express what ‘could’ be taught rather than what ‘must’ be taught, allowing some schools to refrain from including sex education in their curriculum if they so wish.

In the majority of countries, parents do not have the right to withdraw their children from SRE. Instead, they are invited to discuss any concerns about SRE provision with the school. Pupils may be withdrawn, however, in British Columbia, Singapore and Sweden.

#### Further information

[www.inca.org.uk/Sex\\_and\\_relationships\\_education\\_December\\_2009\\_.pdf](http://www.inca.org.uk/Sex_and_relationships_education_December_2009_.pdf)

NFER’s International Information Unit carried out the research for the DCSF and the QCDA as part of the briefing to support the passage of the Children, Schools and Families Bill through Parliament. It is published as a thematic probe on the INCA website.

INCA is the International Review of Curriculum and Assessment Frameworks Internet Archive. It describes curriculum and assessment frameworks for the 3–19 age range in 21 countries worldwide and is available at [www.inca.org.uk](http://www.inca.org.uk)



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To get more information about the Looking for Learning Toolkit visit us online at [www.lookingforlearning.co.uk](http://www.lookingforlearning.co.uk), call +44 (0)20 7531 9696 or email [preet@greatlearning.com](mailto:preet@greatlearning.com)

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