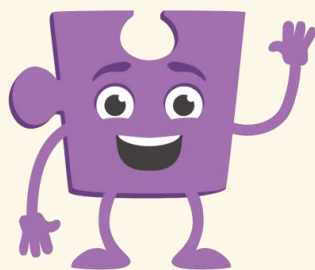
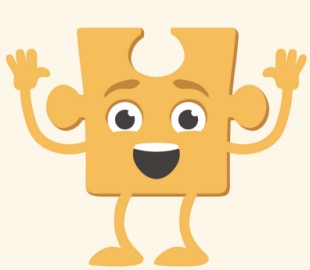




**PROTECTED
CHARACTERISTICS:
OFSTED AND
JIGSAW PSHE 3-11/12**



January 2026



Protected Characteristics: Ofsted and Jigsaw PSHE 3-11

It is important that all children have an understanding of the world they are growing up in; learning how to live alongside and show respect for a diverse range of people. When schools undergo Ofsted inspections, they are assessed on how well they equip children to do this, in line with wider expectations relating to a range of guidance.

The Equality Act 2010

The Public Sector Equality Duty in section 149 of the Equality Act 2010 requires Ofsted to have due regard to the need to:

"(a) eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation and any other conduct that is prohibited by or under this Act;

(b) advance equality of opportunity between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it;

(c) foster good relations between persons who share a relevant protected characteristic and persons who do not share it."

— Equality Act 2010, Section 149(1)

Ofsted, Personal Development and RSHE

While the DfE's RSHE statutory guidance requires pupils to learn about the protected characteristics by the end of their secondary education, Ofsted's Personal Development criteria make clear that *all* pupils, including those in primary, should develop an age-appropriate understanding of the protected characteristics. This means primary schools do need to directly teach about these, and Ofsted will be looking for evidence that they are doing so.

The good news is that Jigsaw PSHE 3-11 already builds understanding of equality, diversity and protected characteristics progressively throughout the programme. This document explains what Ofsted looks for and shows exactly where and how Jigsaw supports schools in meeting these expectations.

What Ofsted expects

The Ofsted Schools Inspection Toolkit (2025) sets out clear expectations regarding personal development and the protected characteristics. Inspectors focus on gathering evidence relating to factors that contribute most strongly to personal development and wellbeing.

From the Ofsted Inspection Toolkit

(p.44), inspectors should consider:

"promoting equality of opportunity so that all pupils can thrive together and understand that individual characteristics make people unique; this includes, but is not limited to, an age-appropriate understanding of the protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010"

(p.47-48), regarding the personal development programme, inspectors should consider the extent to which pupils are given meaningful opportunities to:

"develop their understanding of the protected characteristics and the fundamental British values of democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and mutual respect for and tolerance of those with different faiths and beliefs"

(p.49), regarding inclusive personal development and wellbeing, inspectors should consider the extent to which:

"pupils understand, appreciate and respect differences in the world and its people; they celebrate what we have in common across cultural, religious, ethnic and socioeconomic communities"

"pupils respect the different protected characteristics defined in the Equality Act 2010 and do not tolerate bullying, unlawful discrimination, harassment or victimisation"

Key points for schools

- All primary and secondary schools should be able to demonstrate that no form of discrimination is tolerated and that pupils show respect for those who share the protected characteristics
- Schools will not be able to demonstrate this by pointing to a general policy of encouraging respect for all people
- Schools are not required to teach about all the protected characteristics in every year group; that is a matter for the school to decide
- However, the curriculum should be planned and delivered so that children develop age-appropriate knowledge and understanding during their time at the school
- If a school does not promote pupils' awareness and understanding of the protected characteristics effectively, this may result in an 'attention needed' or 'urgent improvement' judgement for personal development

The Jigsaw approach

The Jigsaw PSHE 3-11/12 teaching materials help schools understand and promote protected characteristics in a pupil-centred way. Rather than including a specific lesson where all characteristics are listed, these are introduced naturally as part of the spiral curriculum. This inclusive approach starts in the early years and develops progressively through the age ranges.

Foundational concepts such as similarities, differences, family diversity and respect are established in the early years, with vocabulary like "stereotype" and "discrimination" built over time. Particular focus on specific characteristics is found in Celebrating Difference, especially in the last few years of primary school. The term "protected characteristic" is explicitly introduced at Ages 8-9 and developed through comprehensive teaching about the Equality Act 2010 up to and including content for Ages 10-11. Some characteristics, such as gender reassignment and pregnancy and maternity, are left to be explicitly taught in secondary school, in line with the RSHE curriculum expectations for older pupils.

Age Group	Content Progression Summary – General Overview
Ages 5-6	Foundation: similarities, differences, uniqueness, family diversity, what bullying is, being inclusive
Ages 6-7	Assumptions, stereotypes (gender), diversity, disability, culture, family as types of difference; challenging gender stereotypes
Ages 7-8	Family diversity, "gay" as vocabulary, "discrimination" introduced; gender stereotypes; family stereotypes challenged
Ages 8-9	"Protected characteristic" term introduced; same-sex relationships; identity and uniqueness
Ages 9-10	Bullying types: racist, homophobic, disability-related, sexist; racism explicitly taught; refugees and prejudice; body image
Ages 10-11	Further protected characteristics teaching: Equality Act 2010, historical discrimination examples, GRT communities, culminating card activity
<i>See appendix for more detailed tables of content across the Jigsaw PSHE 3-11/12 programme</i>	

The Relationships Puzzle provides strong supporting content, particularly around family diversity, gender stereotypes, and same-sex relationships.

The remaining Puzzles also teach important foundational concepts that underpin understanding of protected characteristics, including rights, respect for difference, challenging stereotypes, and valuing diversity. Schools may also choose to use the further Democracy resources in Jigsaw+ to extend learning beyond PSHE lessons.

Creating a safe learning environment

Ground rules are fundamental to creating and maintaining an inclusive and safe teaching and learning environment for PSHE lessons, especially those focusing on equality and the protected characteristics. They enable pupils to:

- feel comfortable exploring values and attitudes
- express their own opinions and consider the views and opinions of others, without the fear of negative feedback, and only if they choose to

In Jigsaw PSHE 3-11/12, The Jigsaw Charter is agreed and owned in every class at the beginning of the year used in every single lesson.

Leadership and management and the DfE's statutory guidance

Relationships education is compulsory for all primary school pupils and relationships and sex education (RSE) is compulsory for all secondary school pupils, with the DfE's statutory guidance (2025, for implementation September 2026) contains information on what schools should do and sets out the requirements they must comply with when teaching relationships education, sex education and health education.

Whilst the 2025 RSHE guidance does not directly require schools to teach about protected characteristics through RSHE, Ofsted's expectations around Personal Development mean schools must still demonstrate age-appropriate teaching about protected characteristics as part of their wider curriculum offer.

Faith teachings on protected characteristics

Schools are at liberty to teach the tenets of any faith regarding the protected characteristics. For example, they may explain that same-sex relationships and gender reassignment are not permitted by a particular religion. However, if they

do so, they must also explain the legal rights LGBT people have under UK law, and that this and LGBT people must be respected.

Protected characteristics content across Jigsaw PSH 3-11

The following lessons provide the most substantial protected characteristics teaching:

1. **Celebrating Difference Ages 8-9, Piece 1** – "Protected characteristic" term introduced
2. **Celebrating Difference Ages 9-10, Piece 2** – Racism explicitly taught
3. **Celebrating Difference Ages 9-10, Piece 3** – Bullying types linked to protected characteristics
4. **Celebrating Difference Ages 10-11, Piece 1** – Historical discrimination examples and UK law
5. **Celebrating Difference Ages 10-11, Piece 2** – Equality Act 2010 explicitly taught
6. **Celebrating Difference Ages 10-11, Piece 6** – Culminating protected characteristics card activity covering all characteristics

Detailed Mapping of Protected Characteristics Content

The following tables identifies a wider range of lessons that teach content related to protected characteristics, organised by age group. This list is not exhaustive as there are numerous other lessons that teach about equality and respect.

Ages 5-6: Foundations

Puzzle	Piece	Lesson Title	Protected Characteristics Content
Celebrating Difference	1-2	The same as... / Different from...	Foundation: similarities and differences between people
Celebrating Difference	5-6	Making New Friends/Celebrating difference.....	Introduces different from, same as and included, with all differences valued
Relationships	1	Families	Family diversity – different types of families, marriage; love, care and stability

Ages 6-7: Introducing key vocabulary

Puzzle	Piece	Lesson Title	Protected Characteristics Content
Celebrating Difference	1	Assumptions	Introduces assumptions and stereotypes – challenging gender stereotypes
Celebrating Difference	2	Stereotypes	Explores stereotypes about boys and girls; respecting individual choices
Celebrating Difference	3	Why does bullying happen?	Bullying related to differences (including cultural differences)
Celebrating Difference	5	We're All Different	Introduces diversity, disability, culture, family as a type of difference to respect
Relationships	1	Families	Family diversity – all types equally valid; marriage as commitment between two people who love each other, stereotypes addressed
Changing Me	2	Growing from Young to Old	Identifies positive qualities in older people; challenging stereotypes about ageing

Ages 7-8: Discrimination introduced

Puzzle	Piece	Lesson Title	Protected Characteristics Content
Celebrating Difference	1	Families	Family diversity – all forms valid; challenges stereotypes about families
Celebrating Difference	3	Witness and feelings	First introduction of gay in context of unkind words; proper meaning, and teaching on why using it as insult is unacceptable
Celebrating Difference	5	Words that harm	Introduces discrimination; builds on Piece 3 and how using words can cause unhappiness and isolation
Relationships	1	Family Roles and Responsibilities	KEY LESSON – Gender stereotypes explicitly taught; jobs/tasks for males or females; challenging traditional assumptions

Relationships	4	Rights, Needs and Wellbeing	Stereotypes about countries and cultures; critical thinking about media images
Relationships	5	Being a Global Citizen	UN Convention on Rights of the Child; equality and justice
Changing Me	1	How Babies Grow	Different family/parent types – what matters most is that babies have adults who love and care for them
Changing Me	5	Family Stereotypes	Recognise and challenge stereotypical ideas about parenting and family roles

Ages 8-9: Protected characteristic as a term first introduced

Puzzle	Piece	Lesson Title	Protected Characteristics Content
Celebrating Difference	1	Judging by Appearances	KEY LESSON - Protected characteristics first introduced; assumptions can lead to bullying; accepting people for who they are
Celebrating Difference	2	Understanding Influences	Sources of assumptions including media
Celebrating Difference	6	Celebrating Difference: how we look	How understanding someone's background increases empathy; conditions like Tourette's, life experiences
Relationships	5	Girlfriends and Boyfriends	Same-sex relationships included – analysis of different couples including same-sex relationships as normal examples, law around marriage and civil partnership
Changing Me	1	Unique Me	Identity shaped by multiple factors, important and different for everyone; from our families, personal choices, skills, experiences
Changing Me	3	Being Part of a Family	Families come in many different forms and what matters most is love, care and support

Ages 9-10: Types of bullying linked to protected characteristics

Puzzle	Piece	Lesson Title	Protected Characteristics Content
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Being Me In My World	2	Refugees and asylum seekers	Vocabulary: persecution, asylum, prejudice; understanding different circumstances
Celebrating Difference	1	Different cultures	KEY LESSON - Protected Characteristic in vocabulary; assumptions and stereotypes about cultures causing unfairness
Celebrating Difference	2	Racism	KEY LESSON - Explicitly teaches racism as discrimination based on race
Celebrating Difference	3	Rumours and Name-calling	KEY LESSON - Bullying Focus Cards: racist, homophobic, disability-related, sexist bullying
Celebrating Difference	4	Types of Bullying	Direct and indirect bullying with examples linked to some protected characteristics
Celebrating Difference	6	Celebrating Difference across the world	Discrimination and stereotypes; welcoming people from different cultures
Changing Me	1	Self-image and Body-image	Body image concerns affect both males and females; comparing to altered images is unfair

Ages 10-11: Protected characteristics linked to Equality Act

Puzzle	Piece	Lesson Title	Protected Characteristics Content
Celebrating Difference	1	Am I Normal?	KEY LESSON - Protected characteristics under UK law as well as wider historical examples: Holocaust, slavery, women's suffrage, LGB rights, girls' education, disability sport; difference between prejudice and discrimination
Celebrating Difference	2	Understanding Difference	KEY LESSON - Equality Act 2010 explicitly taught; GRT communities as protected group; challenging stereotypes; taking action against racism
Celebrating Difference	3	Power Struggles	Power imbalances in harassment and bullying

Celebrating Difference	5	Celebrating Difference	Disability as protected characteristic; Paralympians; laws protect but don't make life easy so how can we support
Celebrating Difference	6	Celebrating Difference	KEY LESSON - Protected characteristics card activity: race, culture, religion/belief, disability, age, sex, sexual orientation; UK Equality Act 2010; promoting equality
Relationships	1	What is Mental Health	Stigma – understanding why people might not stand up for themselves and hide difficulties
Relationships	4	Power and Control	Recognising inappropriate power over others; links to discrimination dynamics

For more information on the protected characteristics, see the [Equality and Human Rights Commission \(EHRC\) website](#).

DfE RSHE Guidance (2025) [Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education guidance](#)

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