

Belfast Royal Academy

per vias sapientiae



Relationships and
Sexuality Education (RSE)
Policy
September 2024

Title	Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) Policy
Development	Consultation with pupils, staff and parents. Cross referenced with DE publication, 'Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance an Update for Post-Primary Schools'. Informed by Equality Act 2006 and relevant sections of UNCRC.
Summary	Guidance for all stakeholders regarding: The ethos of the School regarding the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education.
Purpose	To ensure that all pupils, parents and staff are aware of the cross-curricular nature of RSE and the stage when certain issues are taught.
Operational Date	September 2024
Next Review Date	August 2027
Author and Contact for comments/feedback	Vice Principal (Pastoral)

To be posted on School website	Yes
Date and version posted (if applicable)	September 2024

RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

A LEGAL FRAMEWORK FOR RSE

The purpose of RSE is to:

- promote the spiritual, moral, cultural, intellectual and physical development of pupils at the school and thereby of society; and
- prepare pupils for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

Since the revised Northern Ireland Curriculum was introduced, Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) has been a statutory component of the following key areas of learning:

- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding in the Foundation Stage;
- Personal Development and Mutual Understanding at Key Stages 1 and 2;
- Personal Development and Home Economics statements of requirement for Learning for Life and Work at Key Stage 3; and
- Personal Development strand of Learning for Life and Work at Key Stage 4.

Teaching and Non-Teaching staff, as well as pupils, were consulted regarding the delivery of RSE during the Autumn term 2022. A Parental Consultation was undertaken in December 2022 via a Google Forms questionnaire. School takes into account any parental concerns expressed to them.

The RSE Policy encompasses Sections 2c. and 2e. of the School Development Plan 2022-2025.

AIM

The aim of RSE is to supplement the lifelong learning process by helping our children and young people to acquire knowledge, understanding and skills, as well as nurture the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about relationships, sexual identity, and intimacy in a safe environment.

RSE is important in the curriculum as it:

- Respects the rights of children and young people;
- Promotes a better understanding of diversity and inclusion;
- Helps young people keep themselves safe in the digital world;
- Helps young people to recognise and challenge inappropriate behaviour and touch;
- Provides reliable, accurate and age-appropriate information;
- Increases young people's awareness of sexual health.

OBJECTIVE

The objective of RSE, which is taught in a sensitive and inclusive manner, is to encourage our pupils to value themselves as individuals and to make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives. We are setting out to achieve a safe environment in which pupils can grow, learn and develop effective communication about issues involved in RSE.

MORAL FRAMEWORK

RSE is delivered in Belfast Royal Academy in keeping with the ethos of the School. All pupils have the right to learn in a safe environment, to be treated with respect and dignity, and not to be treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation.

The School's RSE programme aims to present facts in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner, set within a clear framework of values and an awareness of the Northern Ireland legislation on sexual behaviour – The Equality Act 2006. As they mature, pupils are helped to understand the importance of self-restraint, dignity, respect for themselves and others, including those of a different sexual orientation, and acceptance of responsibility.

RSE is taught in a sensitive manner, through: Tutorial, Personal Development, Citizenship etc., which is in harmony with the ethos of the School and in tune with the moral and religious principles held by parents and school management authorities. Teaching takes place within a caring moral context, stressing the importance of stable, loving personal relationships, parental responsibilities and family life. Through the study of Personal Development and Biology, children learn about changes which will occur in their bodies as they grow older. As they progress through their school career pupils become more aware of their own sexuality and have access to the information and guidance in coming to terms with physical and emotional changes and how these affect their feelings towards, and relationships with, other people.

THE MANAGEMENT AND CO-ORDINATION OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION IN THE SCHOOL

OVERVIEW OF PROVISION

The Pastoral Vice Principal, Principal and Learning for Life and Work coordinator are responsible for the planning and delivery of the RSE curriculum.

RSE will be delivered by Class Tutors. These are the pastoral staff who have daily contact with pupils every morning. There is a gender balance amongst this cohort of staff with male teachers assigned to male tutor groups and female teachers assigned to female tutor groups, if staffing allows for this. All teachers will receive training in the content and delivery of RSE and will be required to familiarise themselves with all relevant policies. Training for staff was undertaken in November 2022, which was supplemented by an online course designed by NSPCC: <https://learning.nspcc.org.uk/training/talk-relationships-rse-training>

The RSE program will be timetabled for a Tuesday morning Tutorial period, sitting alongside the Pastoral Calendar for assemblies, where similar themes will be dealt with. Pupils in each Year Group will be taught a different strand of RSE so that as they progress through school, they build up a complete picture of ideas, skills and competencies. A six to eight-week programme of study will sit alongside other key themes within Learning for Life and Work (depending on year group). As previously stated, classes are single-gender in an attempt to develop safe environments in which pupils feel comfortable discussing sensitive issues.

DELIVERY

In translating the aims of the School Policy into classroom practice, the School ensures that teaching is at all times appropriate to the maturity and level of understanding of the pupils concerned. As maturity is not always determined by chronological age, teachers are alert to the personal and emotional circumstances of the individual pupil. Teachers will be aware of, and take into account, the variety of existing pupil knowledge, the different attitudes and beliefs and the pupils' capacity to understand the issues. Pupils have opportunities to provide feedback about the content of the programme of Relationships and Sexuality Education in the school so that it can be responsive to their needs.

Good relationships are important in any classroom; however, they are particularly important when teaching Relationships and Sexuality Education. In Relationships and Sexuality Education, learning is most effective when it takes place in a safe, secure, respectful and inclusive space, where pupils can express their feelings and opinions and participate confidently and freely without embarrassment, judgement or ridicule from their peers.

Teachers will employ an enquiry-based approach when exploring sensitive issues. Using methodologies in which pupils actively participate, such as scenarios, role plays and debates will ensure that they gain deeper knowledge, understanding, thinking skills and personal capabilities, attitudes and dispositions, and that they really engage in the learning process (based on the prepared CCEA RSE resources).

School must ensure that young people with SEN in mainstream schools have appropriate, accessible and relevant Relationships and Sexuality Education. School will engage in the careful planning and adapting of resources and teaching activities to ensure that there are no barriers to participation or learning for pupils with SEN compared to their peers.

Teachers must try to ensure that they develop the knowledge, understanding and skills of pupils to enable them to:

- identify inappropriate and exploitative behaviour;
- help develop their own prevention strategies to stay safe;
- recognise and build healthy relationships; and
- know who they can talk to.

RESOURCES

The delivery of RSE during Tutorial periods will utilise CCEA resources available via their online RSE hub.

<https://ccea.org.uk/learning-resources/relationships-and-sexuality-education-rse>

Content will be Key Stage appropriate, up-to-date, sensitive, factual and relevant. This approach will enable us to deliver effective programmes in line with our ethos and RSE policy, and to ensure that the wide-ranging needs of our young people are met. Teachers will adopt a learner-centred approach to their delivery to ensure that lessons are meaningful and engaging for pupils.

PLANNING

The CCEA online RSE hub will be accessible to all staff should they wish to research any topic covered. Material that is gathered from other sources should be factual, unbiased, age-appropriate, inclusive, sensitive and from reliable sources.

The Pastoral Vice Principal will meet with the course coordinator on a regular basis and for a final review at the end of the academic year in order to oversee the planning, content and relevance of the material.

After the various consultations with Heads of Year, pupils via the Pupil and School Councils, Teaching Staff questionnaire and Parental questionnaire; the following topics will be delivered to pupils in the following Year Groups in line with the CCEA resources and our School's ethos.

Form	Topic(s)
I	Social media and its effects on relationships and self-esteem Healthy, positive sexual expression and relationships
II	Menstrual wellbeing LGBTQ+
III	Consent Developments in contraception
IV	Domestic and sexual violence and abuse SEN
V	Teen parenting

RESPONDING TO QUESTIONS IN RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

When teaching Relationships and Sexuality Education, the natural inquisitiveness of young people often results in teachers being asked many questions which they had not planned for, and which may challenge their own values system. There will be occasions when teachers will have to use their own discretion and judgement about how to deal with particular questions raised by a pupil or a group of pupils.

Teachers should exercise their professional judgement as to whether it is appropriate to deal with the question in a whole-class forum. It may be more appropriate to respond on an individual basis or to arrange time for group discussion outside class time.

The teacher may also wish to discuss the questions posed with a senior member of staff to ascertain how they would like the matter to be handled. The teacher can approach the relevant Head of Year, Key Stage Leader, Senior Teacher or Vice Principal for pastoral care should they need advice or help with any matter.

STAFF DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING

All staff will receive training prior to the commencement of the academic year where their comments, concerns and feedback can be addressed. All staff also receive training in Child Protection and Safeguarding which will be of benefit in their teaching of RSE.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLOSURES (INDIVIDUALLY AND IN THE CLASSROOM SETTING)

CONFIDENTIALITY

When a teacher is approached by a pupil for counselling on sexual matters they, where appropriate, encourage the pupil to seek advice from his or her parents and/or from qualified professionals. Where the circumstances lead the teacher to believe that the pupil has embarked on, or is contemplating, conduct which is likely to place him or her in moral or physical danger or in breach of the law, the teacher has a duty to inform the pupil of the risks involved. The pupil should be made aware that the teacher can offer no guarantee of confidentiality. Whether the teacher should take the matter further, by informing the designated teacher for child protection or the Principal, and where the Principal should consider involving the pupil's parents, the specialist support services, or the designated child protection officer of the Education and Library Board will depend on the particular circumstances involved and on the professional judgement of the staff concerned.

DEALING WITH DISCLOSURES

The foundation for the effective delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education is the building of secure, trusting, respectful relationships between the teacher and their pupils. Pupils must also know and understand that the promise of confidentiality is never an option in the classroom or school setting. They must know where the sources of confidential help are and how they can access them. It must also be clear to pupils that, whilst teachers will offer support, they are obligated to notify the child protection/safeguarding teacher/team if they are concerned that the pupil may be 'at risk'.

Teachers must follow the guidance provided to deal with personal disclosures in accordance with the procedures set out in DE's booklet Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection (Circular 1999/10) and School's own policies.

- The staff member should immediately inform the designated child protection teacher/member of the safeguarding team.
- The designated child protection teacher/member of the safeguarding team must inform/consult with Social Services and/or the PSNI.
- No staff member should take on the role of investigator – this is the responsibility of Social Services and the PSNI.
- Staff members should explain their responsibilities to refer cases of alleged abuse to the appropriate authorities, but they also must ensure that the matter will only be disclosed to the people who need to know about it.
- Staff members should give the pupil time to talk without interrupting or probing, recording exactly what the pupil says, whilst not promising confidentiality. It is very important that any pupil who feels that they cannot talk to or does not wish to talk to their parents or carers has access to other sources of support. The school should also make parents or carers aware of how they address pupil disclosures.

SENSITIVE ISSUES

Sensitive issues can include those about which different individuals/groups disagree and hold strong opinions on. Such issues can often divide society and arouse strong feelings as they tend to deal with fundamental questions of values and beliefs. Issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual abuse and family lifestyle all have the potential to be sensitive, depending on the personal experiences, opinions and values of each individual within the classroom and on the distinctive ethos of the school.

Sensitive issues are 'part and parcel' of life. Young people are aware of them, and want to talk about and understand them, particularly those sensitive issues which are also topical. Pupils should not be denied the opportunity to explore such issues simply because a teacher feels uncomfortable discussing them, and they should not be sheltered from discussing sensitive issues in an age-appropriate way. To do either is to leave young people ignorant and unprepared to engage and deal with the diverse and complex range of issues facing them in society today.

When teaching sensitive issues, teachers will plan for and be prepared to deal with the strong emotional responses which pupils often have. Teachers will endeavour to help pupils develop an understanding of their feelings, thinking and behaviour, and to develop strategies to manage and cope with these feelings.

INVOLVEMENT OF OUTSIDE AGENCIES/INDIVIDUALS IN SUPPORTING THE DELIVERY OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Any involvement of outside agencies will follow the usual protocol of being rigorously checked prior to their employment. Where necessary, the School will consult with parents and carers prior to engaging any outside agencies.

PROCEDURES FOR INVOLVING AND CONSULTING WITH PARENTS OR CARERS

It is important that parents are involved in, and fully informed about, the School's programme on RSE and its approaches to particularly sensitive issues. The teaching offered by the School reinforces and strengthens positive family relationships and the role of parents. The counselling and advice available to individual pupils complements and supports the proper exercise of parental rights and responsibilities. A Parental Consultation was completed in December 2022.

WITHDRAWAL FROM RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

Whilst Relationships and Sexuality Education is a statutory component of the Northern Ireland curriculum, parents or carers have a right to have their children educated in accordance with their wishes. Therefore, whilst 'there is no legislative provision permitting parental withdrawal from sex education', schools can grant these requests on an individual basis (Lundy, Emerson, Lloyd, Byrne and Yohanis, 2013, page 25).

School will consider how we can support parents or carers who choose to withdraw their child from all or part of Relationships and Sexuality Education on a case-by-case basis. If a parent or carer chooses to withdraw a child from all or part of Relationships and Sexuality Education, the potentially detrimental effect that this can have on the pupil will be discussed with the parent/carers. Parents/carers will be asked to consider the social and emotional effects of being excluded, as well as the likelihood that the pupil will hear their peers' version of what happened or what was said in the classes, rather than the safe and reliable source of the teacher.

Ultimately, School will respect the wishes of the parent or carer and seek to provide appropriate support to the pupils.

LINKS ACROSS THE CURRICULUM AND TO THE WIDER LIFE OF THE SCHOOL

Learning and teaching in other subjects complements Relationships and Sexuality Education across the key stages, for example in Local and Global Citizenship, Religious Studies and Science see the table below.

SUBJECT	Physical Development	Emotional Education	Social Development	Relationships (family/peers)	Personal Safety	Issues of Abuse	Self Esteem	Conflict Resolution	Child Birth	Teenage Pregnancy	Child Development	Contraception	Physiology of Sex	HIV/AIDS	Sexually Transmitted Infections	IVF Treatments	Gender Issues	Other
Art and Design	1,2,4,5,L6,M6	1,4,5,L6,M6	1,3,4,5,L6,M6	1,4,5,L6	1-M6		1-M6	1-M6										
Biology	3,5					5			3,5		3,5	3,5	3,5	5	3,5	5		3,5
Business Studies			1-M6	1-M6	F4,L6		1-M6	L6,M6									5	
CEIAG			1 - M6		L6		L6										5	
Chemistry					1-M6	4												
Drama		2,3	2,3,4,5	2,3,4,5	2	2,3	3											4,5
English		1-M6	2,3	1-M6							M6						1-M6	
Geography					2,3			3										
History								2,4									3	
Home Economics	3,5,L6	3,5,L6	3,L6	2,3,L6			2,3,L6	2,3,L6		5,L6,M6	3,5,L6			M6	M6			
ICT																		1
LLW (Citizenship)	1	1,-,5	F1 - 5	1		4,5	1,2,3,4	3,4,5										1,-5
LLW (Employability)			F1 - 5				F1 - 5											3, 4, 5
LLW (Personal Development)		1,4,5	4,5		1		4		1	1,5	1	1,5		1	1,5		1,4	
PE	F1-5	F1-5	F1-5	F1-5	F1-5		F1-5											
RE				2,3		3,5	1	5		3,5		5		5	3,5	5	3,5	
Technology					1 - M6													
Tutorial			L6,5,4	5			5,4	L6			5	5			5			

The wider pastoral programme supports and complements Relationships and Sexuality Education, for example, assembly themes, topics in LORIC etc.

LINKS TO OTHER SCHOOL POLICIES

1. Anti-bullying Policy – including homophobic bullying type behaviour, transgender bullying type behaviours, cyber bullying, sexual harassment and bullying type behaviours for other reasons relating to sex, gender, or relationships
2. Policy on using outside agencies and vetting arrangements
3. Pastoral Care Policy
4. Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy – how the school will support pupils who are thought to be ‘at risk’, and how the school will assess the ‘at risk’ pupils
5. Positive Behaviour Policy
6. Internet Safety/E-Safety Policy
7. Drugs Education Policy

DOCUMENTATION

The School will endeavour to signpost relevant and useful documentation to both pupils and parents via Pupil Notes which are disseminated on a weekly basis. The School will aim to provide, at the appropriate time;

- Parent or carer-friendly summary of Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy
- Pupil-friendly summary of Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy
- Pupil-friendly list of contacts, websites and organisations related to Relationships and Sexuality Education to supplement the list already provided in the Pupil Diary
- Relevant DE Circulars
- Outline programme across the key stages
- Independent counselling service/support services
- Brief details of outside agencies/individuals the school uses to support the delivery of Relationships and Sexuality Education and an outline of the session(s)
- Northern Ireland Curriculum link
- Link to the ‘iMatter’ programme