



BALLYMENA ACADEMY

EST. 1828

Relationships and Sexuality Education Policy

Policy ratified by Board of Governors: March 2025
Date of next Review: March 2028

INTRODUCTION

The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy is designed to reflect the ethos and values of the school and be compatible with the rights of the child as detailed in the Children (Northern Ireland) Order 1995.

This policy has been written in accordance with the guidance provided in:-

- Department of Education (DE) Circulars 2001/15, 2001/15a, 2001/15b, 2010/01, 2013/16, 2015/22, 2024/1
- Relationships and Sexuality Guidance (CCEA RSE Hub)
- The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland 2006.)
- ETI ‘Report of an Evaluation of Relationships and Sexuality Education in Post-Primary Schools’ 2011
- The Equality Act (Sexual Orientation) Regulations (Northern Ireland) 2006.
- The relevant sections of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child(UNCRC) – UNICEF UK
- The Relationships and Sexuality Education (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 (“the 2023 Regulations”) amend the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006
- The Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007 in respect of Learning for Life and Work (LLW)

Effective Relationships and Sexuality Education, taught in a sensitive and inclusive manner, appropriate to the pupil’s emotional and physical age and stage of development, is essential if young people are to make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives. Relationships and Sexuality Education should provide young people with:

- the opportunity to develop the skills to build healthy and respectful relationships, stay safe, and develop their own moral thinking and value system; and
- up-to-date, accurate and accessible information about reproduction, sex and sexual health matters.

An absence of such provision may leave pupils with a learning and skills deficit, making them more susceptible to misinformation, inappropriate behaviours, sexual abuse and exploitation.

DEFINING RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

‘Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) is a lifelong process that encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills, and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy.

Sexuality is an integral part of the human personality and has biological, cultural, psychological, social and spiritual dimensions.’
(CCEA Relationships and Sexuality Education Guidance: An Update for Post-Primary Schools 2018).

AIMS

The school's RSE programme aims to:-

- encourage pupils to develop mutual respect, self-esteem and well-being within the context of healthy and respectful friendships and relationships and in doing so develop responsible behaviour and the ability to make informed decisions
- help pupils foster an understanding of, and healthy attitude towards, human sexuality and relationships within a moral, social and spiritual framework
- present information in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner

The programme is set within a framework of values which are in keeping with the school's ethos, the law and best practice guidance.

INCLUSION

'All pupils have a right to an education which adequately prepares them for adult life, regardless of their age, gender identity, sexual orientation, culture, disability status, religion or social background'. (Equality Act 2006)

'All pupils have the right to learn in a safe environment, to be treated with respect and dignity and not be treated any less favourably on grounds of their actual or perceived sexual orientation'. (Circular Amendment No 2010/01)

'Relationships and Sexuality Education is taught in an inclusive way to ensure all pupils feel free to share opinions and none feel discriminated against based on their gender or sexual orientation.' (Equality Act 2006)

Through RSE, the school aims to deliver an inclusive Relationships and Sexuality Education, which is relevant, accessible and age appropriate to all pupils. The RSE programme will:

- be set in a moral framework which is inclusive with respect to culture, religion, sexual orientation and social background;
- seek to clarify values and attitudes towards sex, sexuality and relationships, and to encourage respect for and empathy with the values and attitudes of others;
- embrace the diversity of cultural identity and encourage pupils to be aware of the traditions and beliefs of others, promoting respect, mutual understanding and acceptance, and
- include activities to provide opportunities to discuss interests, attitudes, emotions, concerns and feelings.
- continue to create a climate of support, confidence and fulfilment which allows pupils to feel included and safe, especially if they are struggling with issues around gender identity and sexuality.
- promote understanding and respect.

The Personal, Social and Health Education Co-ordinator will liaise with the SENCO and Heads of Year in the careful planning and adaptation of resources, where necessary, to ensure there are no barriers to participation or learning for pupils with SEN.

OBJECTIVES OF RELATIONSHIPS AND SEXUALITY EDUCATION

The underlying objectives of the RSE programme are to:-

- respect the rights of children and young people;
- develop within pupils a positive sense of self-awareness, self-esteem and self-worth;
- develop a deeper knowledge and understanding of personal safety, and the importance of having equal, mutually respectful, consensual, non-exploitative and non-violent relationships;
- develop the resilience to work their way through difficult situations and find out where to access help and support;
- introduce pupils to coping strategies to help in dealing with relationship breakdowns;
- help pupils realise the consequences of their actions (moral, physical and emotional) and to take responsibility for them;
- provide opportunities for pupils to explore the moral and ethical issues surrounding sexuality;
- develop within pupils a respect for their own and other people's bodies;
- develop pupils' skills in recognising and protecting themselves from abuse;
- help pupils keep themselves safer in a rapidly changing digital world, recognising implications of actions;
- give accurate information in order to correct misunderstandings that pupils may have gained from their peers or from other unhealthy influences e.g. popular culture, online influences;
- enable pupils to communicate about feelings, sexuality and development using appropriate language;
- enable pupils to understand the influence of messages from peers and media on their own values;
- prepare pupils to cope with social, physical and emotional challenges of growing up and so prepare them for adult life;
- increase pupils' awareness of sexual health;
- promote, amongst pupils, a better understanding of diversity and inclusion;
- provide pupils with the knowledge base needed to make informed choices;
- reinforce the role of parents/carers as a major influence on the growth and development of the child;
- help pupils to appreciate their parents/carers, their own role within the family and the responsibilities of parenthood;
- help pupils to appreciate positive role models e.g. teachers and other significant individuals, in helping to make safe and informed choices;
- encourage an awareness of the law as it relates to sexual matters.

MORAL VALUES AND FRAMEWORK

The morals and values reflected within the teaching of RSE are in line with the School's ethos. RSE is taught in a sensitive manner across a range of curriculum subjects, as well as through the Personal Development programme of study, and should enable pupils to find empowerment in being accepting and respectful of those who may not share their beliefs.

There should be an appreciation that friendships and relationships should be based on mutual and self-respect, non-exploitation, honesty, trust and commitment.

RSE should be tailored to the age, maturity and understanding of pupils, in an objective, balanced and sensitive manner, set within a clear framework of values and an awareness of the law on sexual behaviour. Pupils should be encouraged to appreciate the value of family, long-term loving relationships (including marriage and civil partnerships) and the responsibilities of parenthood. They should be helped to consider the importance of self-restraint, dignity, respect for themselves and others, acceptance of responsibility, sensitivity towards the needs and views of others, loyalty and fidelity. They should be enabled to recognise the physical, emotional and moral implications and risks of certain types of behaviour and to accept that everyone must behave responsibly in sexual matters. Teachers should however acknowledge that many children come from backgrounds that do not reflect such values and experiences. Sensitivity is therefore needed to avoid causing hurt and offence to them and their families, and to encourage the development of their sense of worth.

(Adapted from DfEE Circular No 5/1994. Education Act 1993: Sex Education in Schools (Paragraph 8).

CONTENT OF RSE

The legal minimum content to be taught by schools is set out in the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (NI) 2007 as high-level areas of learning. RSE forms a statutory component of the following key areas of learning:

- Personal Development and Home Economics statements of requirement at key stage 3; and
- Personal Development strand of Learning for Life and Work (LLW) at key stage 4.

RSE curriculum content is in accordance with Department of Education guidance. The Relationships and Sexuality Education (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023 ("the 2023 Regulations") amend the Education (Northern Ireland) Order 2006 and the Education (Curriculum Minimum Content) Order (Northern Ireland) 2007 in respect of Learning for Life and Work (LLW) to ensure that pupils at key stages 3 and 4 have the opportunity to "*Receive age-appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion*" (referred to in DENI Circular 2024/1 and in this policy as "Article 5(1A) education").

CURRICULAR DELIVERY OF RSE

Ballymena Academy aims, through its delivery of RSE, to allow young people to be involved in discussions and sharing of viewpoints to ensure the delivery is focused on child centred provision. Pupils will have access to reliable, accurate and relevant information which reflects their age and maturity and know where to access a range of services if they need help or support. Information is presented in an objective and balanced way, in which pupils are encouraged to reflect on their attitudes and values and be able to express their views (Articles 12-14, UNCRC). Pupils are also encouraged to recognise fact, opinion and religious conviction.

The RSE Programme is provided in the broader context of health, personal, social and moral education. In Ballymena Academy Relationships and Sexuality Education is delivered within such subjects as Learning for Life and Work (LLW), Science, Religious Education, English and Home Economics. Aspects of the programme are also delivered through weekly school assemblies and tutor groups or via external agencies.

- It is generally taught in mixed classes and is delivered in a manner that informs, however, single sex groups may be used for discussion at the discretion of the teacher.
- As far as possible, active pupil-centred teaching methods are used and, where appropriate, any Special Educational Needs (SEN) will be taken into consideration.
- The depth of coverage is gradual, in accordance with the age group addressed, and the programme is co-ordinated to meet the needs of our pupils.
- The programme ensures progression and continuity.
- Staff training will take place as required.

The school recognises that the home exerts a major influence on all aspects of a young person's life, and especially so in the domain of relationships and sexuality.

ENGAGEMENT WITH PARENTS AND CIRCUMSTANCES IN WHICH A PUPIL MAY BE EXCUSED FROM EITHER ALL OF ARTICLE 5(1A) EDUCATION OR SPECIFIED ELEMENTS OF THAT EDUCATION.

In accordance with the 2023 Regulations the circumstances in which, at the request of a parent, a pupil may be excused Article 5(1A) education or specified elements of that education are as follows:-

- For pupils in years 8, 9, 10 and 11, where a parent makes a written request for a pupil to be excused from Article 5(1A) education or specified elements of it by confirming which elements of the education, the pupil should be excused.
- For pupils in year 12, where a parent makes a written request for a pupil to be excused from Article 5(1A) education or specified elements of it by confirming which elements of the education the pupil should be excused from and confirms that the pupil does not object to being excused.

In accordance with the 2023 Regulations the process by a parent requests a pupil may be excused Article 5(1A) education or specified elements of that education is as follows:-

- The request should be made in writing and addressed to the Principal, identifying the pupil to whom the request relates. The request should specify whether the request relates to all of Article 5(1A) education or specified elements of that education and confirm which element or elements are contrary to their wishes. Parents are not required to provide a reason to the school. Where the circumstances prescribed in the Regulations are met, the pupil will be excused from Article 5(1A) education. However, the exception would be a pupil in year 12 where the pupil objects to being excused. The relevant documentation used by school and parents is attached in appendix 1.
- Parents who make a request for pupil excusal may wish to discuss the request with the school to ensure that the wishes of the parent and their child are understood. This also provides an opportunity for the school to outline the benefits of receiving this important education and any possible detrimental effects withdrawal might have. This could include any social and emotional effects of being excluded, as well as the likelihood of the child hearing their peers' second-hand version of what was taught and discussed, rather than participating directly in the lesson. Although it should be noted that any detrimental effects may be mitigated if the parent proposes to deliver the specific education to their child at home instead. The school will document this process and keep a record of any discussions held.
- The school will retain a record of the request and provide an acknowledgement of it.
- It is recommended the request should be made during the school year in which the pupil is going to be receiving comprehensive, age-appropriate and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion.
- Where a pupil has been excused from Article 5(1A) education, the excusal remains in force until the end of the school year in which the request was made or in the case of a specified element until that education has been completed.

In order to allow parents sufficient time to make informed decisions in relation to their child being excused from Article 5 (1A) education, the school will provide advance information about the delivery of any Article 5 (1A) education during the academic year in which the material is to be delivered.

USE OF EXTERNAL AGENCIES

Appropriate external agencies may be invited to complement and supplement the teaching of the RSE programme through e.g. presentations and workshops. Care is taken to ensure that external agencies comply with the School's RSE Policy and that there is collaboration between the RSE coordinator, Head of Year and external staff regarding the content and also follow-up and progression. Parents will be informed with regard to the nature of the presentation and professionals who are in agreement with the values and ethos of the school will be involved.

Where external agencies are used within the school, they should be familiar with Ballymena Academy's Child Protection and RSE policies in advance of their presentation, agree to respect the ethos of the school and issues around confidentiality. A teacher will be present during all presentations.

SEXUAL ORIENTATION AND GENDER IDENTITY

The issue of sexual orientation and sexual identity will be handled in a sensitive, non-confrontational and non-judgemental way.

All members of the school community, regardless of sexual orientation or identity, gender, ethnicity, religion etc. will be respected and valued and have a right to learn in a safe environment. Pupils should allow others the right to hold different views/lifestyles from their own in a peaceful manner.

The school's Addressing Bullying Policy makes it clear that bullying (defined as the wilful, conscious desire physically or mentally to hurt, threaten or frighten someone) is wrong and is not tolerated within the school community. It is therefore unacceptable for any pupil to experience bullying associated with gender or sexuality issues and any instances of this will be dealt with in accordance with the Addressing Bullying Policy.

SENSITIVE ISSUES

Such issues can tend to deal with fundamental questions of values and beliefs, for example issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, sexual orientation, gender identity, sexual abuse and family lifestyle.

Sensitive issues will be presented in a way which is free from sensationalism and bias, and sensitively pitched to the needs of the pupils and situations. Pupils will be provided with a balanced and non-judgemental view that respects a range of religious beliefs and the possible experiences of the pupils.

At all times, when dealing with sensitive issues, staff will show due care and sensitivity as they carry out the above procedures.

Medical/biological terminology will be used and the depth of coverage and detail will be in accordance with the specifications from the relevant examination boards.

CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLOSURES

Whilst a pupil's right to privacy will be respected in the RSE classroom at all times and no pupil will be expected to ask or answer any personal questions, pupils must also know and understand that the promise of confidentiality is never an option in the classroom or school setting. It must 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 take decisions relating to personal disclosures in accordance with

the procedures set out in DE's booklet *Pastoral Care in Schools: Child Protection* (Circular 1999/10) and the School's Child Protection Policy.

Personal medical advice will not be given by a teacher to any pupil. There will be an acknowledgement that only doctors and health professionals should give medical advice and pupils will be advised to seek advice from parents or medical practitioners. Where appropriate the Health Education Co-ordinator will report a matter to the Vice Principal (Pastoral) who may consult with the designated officer for Child Protection in the Education Authority . The Principal will be kept informed.

At the disclosure or suspicion of abuse the school's protection procedures will be invoked (see Safeguarding policy).

IMPLEMENTATION, MONITORING AND EVALUATION

The Personal, Social and Health Education Co-ordinator is responsible for:-

- ensuring the effective delivery of RSE. This will involve reviewing, monitoring and evaluating the RSE programme, teaching and learning;
- providing resources for teachers, drawing up age-appropriate programmes of study/ schemes of work in line with the most up-to-date DE and CCEA requirements;
- ensuring staff involved in teaching the programme receive appropriate training;
- liaising with the Vice Principals (Pastoral and Curriculum), the Head of LLW, Heads of subjects delivering RSE content, the designated teacher for child protection, Board of Governors, all staff, parents, and health and other outside agencies on RSE matters.

The Health Education Committee, Health Co-ordinator, other key stakeholders including the LLW Co-ordinator and the Pastoral Vice-Principal (Pastoral Care) individual members of staff and subject leaders, with responsibility for discrete units of the programme will also provide input into the policy development and review.

This policy will be kept under review and reviewed every 3 years, or when a change in legislation requires updates. The review process includes consultation with representative groups of staff, pupils and parents, as well as the Board of Governors.

The Board of Governors has ratified this policy and is responsible for the implementation of the RSE programme.

The approved policy is available on the School website.

APPENDIX 1

PARENT REQUESTING THAT A PUPIL BE EXCUSED FROM ARTICLE 5(1A) EDUCATION OR A SPECIFIED ELEMENT OF IT.

To the Principal of Ballymena Academy

For pupils in Year 8, 9, 10 and 11

I am writing to request that my son/daughter [Name] who is a pupil in Year x at your school be excused from age-appropriate, comprehensive or scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion or the specified element or elements of it as set out below. I can confirm that this education is contrary to my wishes.

Please tick as appropriate

- Prevention of early pregnancy
- Access to abortion
- Whole talk

For pupils in Year 12

I am writing to request that my son/daughter [Name] who is a pupil in Year 12 at your school be excused from age-appropriate, comprehensive or scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion or the specified element or elements of it as set out below. I can confirm that this education is contrary to my wishes. I can confirm that [Name of pupil] has not objected to being excused.

Please tick as appropriate

- Prevention of early pregnancy
- Access to abortion
- Whole talk

Name of parent. _____

Signature _____

Date. _____