Relationships and Sex Education (RSHE) Policy

The Abbey School, Reading

Reviewed by:	Assistant Head Junior School Deputy Head Senior School	September 2025
Ratified by:	Whole School Leadership Committee and Governor Audit	September 2025
Next review: September 2026		

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1. Introduction

The intention of this policy is to provide clear guidance for all staff and parents and to define The Abbey School's approach to RSHE (Relationships, Sex and Health Education).

Many of the pressing issues facing young people today fall within the remit of Personal, Social, Health and Economic Education (PSHE) and Citizenship Education as well as important learning around RSHE. We believe that effective RSHE is essential if our students are to make responsible and well-informed decisions about their lives. It contributes to promoting the spiritual, moral, social, cultural, emotional, mental and physical development of our students, preparing them for the opportunities, responsibilities and experiences of adult life.

The policy will be reviewed on a regular basis to ensure that it is in line with current Government guidance and legislation. This policy takes account of:

- Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (DfE July 2019)
- Keeping Children Safe in Education (September 2025)
- Equality Act (2010)

The Equality Act places duties on schools to address prejudice-based bullying and to help prevent it from happening, and in doing so to keep protected characteristic groups safe. RSHE and PSHE education, with its focus on identity and equality, forms part of the way the school seeks to fulfil this duty.

The policy is also reviewed regularly to ensure that the RSHE programme continues to meet the needs of students.

This policy is available via the school website for parents and carers to view.

2. Definition

RSHE is learning about the emotional, social and physical aspects of growing up, relationships, sex, human sexuality and sexual health. It should equip children and young people with the information, skills and positive values to have safe, fulfilling relationships, to enjoy their sexuality and to take responsibility for their sexual health and wellbeing. The teaching of relationship and sex education is applicable to all sexual orientations. RSHE is an identifiable part of the PSHE curriculum, which has planned, timetabled lessons across all the Key Stages.

3. Rationale and Ethos

Students at The Abbey School are growing up in an increasingly complex world. This presents many positive and exciting opportunities but also challenges and risks. Our aim is to ensure that in this environment, our students know how to be safe and healthy, and how to manage their academic, personal and social lives in a positive way. Much of this is managed through our PSHE programme, in which RSHE is embedded.

The topics covered within the RSHE curriculum are wide-ranging and at times there may be understandable and legitimate areas of contention. This policy is designed to outline the

purpose and content of RSHE, whilst ensuring that all of the compulsory subject content is age and developmentally appropriate.

We aim to teach RSHE sensitively and inclusively, with respect to the backgrounds and beliefs of students and parents while always with the aim of providing students with the knowledge they need of the law and the legal implications of their actions.

In the Senior School, teaching will build on the knowledge acquired in the younger years and develop further students' understanding with an increased focus on risk areas such as intimate relationships, sex and possible associated harms. Our belief is that mental wellbeing is central to a student's success and will enable them to build positive relationships. We know that children and young people are increasingly experiencing challenges, and that young people are at particular risk of feeling lonely.

The RSHE curriculum will give them the knowledge and capability to take care of themselves and receive support if problems arise. RSHE is taught in a wider context of helping to foster students' wellbeing and develop resilience and character that we know are fundamental to them being happy, successful and productive members of society. Central to this is students' belief that they can achieve goals, both academic and personal; to stick to tasks that will help them achieve those goals, and to recover from challenging periods in their lives. We promote positive personal attributes including courage, honesty, kindness.

RSHE provision is intended to:

- Give a positive view of human sexuality, with honest and medically accurate information, so that students can learn about their bodies and sexual and reproductive health in ways that are appropriate to their age and maturity.
- Foster gender equality and LGBTQI+ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, gender questioning) equality and challenge all forms of discrimination in RSHE lessons and in every-day school life.
- Give students opportunities to reflect on values and influences (such as from peers, media, faith and culture) that may shape their attitudes to relationships and sex, and nurtures respect for different views.
- Promote safe, equal, caring and enjoyable relationships and discuss real-life issues appropriate to the age and stage of students, including friendships, families, consent, relationship abuse, sexual exploitation and safe relationships online.
- Provide reliable sources of information, including about the law and legal rights, and distinguish between fact and opinion.

4. Roles and Responsibilities

The Heads of PSHE across the stages of the School have direct responsibility for the RSHE programme, working closely with others, such as the Heads of Science, Designated Safeguarding Leads (DSLs), School Nurses, etc. This work is supported by the management teams, with specific responsibilities for the oversight of RSHE allocated to Assistant Heads at the Junior School and to the Deputy Head at the Senior School.

RSHE is delivered by form teachers and tutors during PSHE and Skills for Life lessons and also as part of the science curriculum. Teachers, Teaching Assistants (TAs) and support staff take part in INSET sessions to ensure awareness and understanding of this critical aspect of our curriculum. External speakers and experts are also invited to deliver aspects of the programme.

Teachers are aware that effective RSHE, which brings an understanding of what is and what is not appropriate in a relationship, can lead to a disclosure of a child protection issue. In the event of any disclosure, the School's safeguarding procedure will be followed and the DSLs informed as appropriate.

5. Curriculum Design

Junior School approach

In order to keep our students safe, it is vital that their learning about the social and emotional aspects of sexual reproduction begins in the early stages of primary school. At this time, and throughout the primary phase, students will have many different relationships: acquaintances, friends, close friends, 'best friends', distant and close family relations and classmates. Often, there may be some sort of physical contact with some of these people, from handshakes, to holding hands, to hugging, cuddling and kissing. Learning to judge what is appropriate and feels right for themselves and others is a skill that is partly inherent and partly learnt over time.

A planned, developmental PSHE curriculum which includes RSHE is the best way of teaching children and young people about recognising what type of physical contact they and others are comfortable with within their relationships. Further, as part of our PSHE curriculum, RSHE is the learning that helps students to recognise healthy relationships. It helps them to understand and manage the changes that can happen in, and to, relationships as they grow up, the new feelings that may come as these relationships alter, and how to manage feelings and relationships to keep themselves and others they care about healthy and safe.

Children should learn that their body belongs to them and that they can say who has access to it. Learning to respect boundaries – their own and other people's – helps children and young people to understand the need to obtain consent and that everyone has the right to give or not give their consent for any activity, sexual or otherwise. It is important that our students are empowered with the knowledge they need to recognise and to report abuse, including emotional, physical and sexual abuse. At all stages it will be important to balance teaching children about making sensible decisions to stay safe (including online) whilst being clear it is never the fault of a child who is abused and why victim blaming is always wrong. As part of a comprehensive programme and whole school approach, this knowledge can support safeguarding of children.

To ensure progression and a spiral curriculum, we use and adapt a scheme called Jigsaw, to support our chosen teaching and learning programme, tailoring the resources and content to our students' needs. Direct teaching occurs within the themes of 'Relationships' and 'Changing Me'.

Senior School approach

RSHE is delivered through a bespoke programme which responds to the needs of our students. It is taught within weekly Skills for Life lessons every Wednesday morning for 50 minutes, mainly by form teachers but also through vetted guest speakers. Occasionally qualified staff who are trained and confident in talking about relevant, age-appropriate issues lead specialist sessions such as healthy and unhealthy relationships, equality, pleasure, abuse, sexuality, prejudice, gender identity, online safety, sex and consent, whilst always recognising the unique nature of each individual.

The school nurse and our trained mindfulness practitioners also deliver sessions. Our school assemblies will also cover topics relevant to RSHE, and there is crossover within other subjects such as Philosophy and Theology, Biology and Food & Nutrition in particular.

Matters such as puberty, abortion and routes to parenthood are presented in a clear, impartial and scientific way, and the law is addressed on issues such as forced marriage and FGM.

Our RSHE is designed to promote gender equality through challenging gender stereotypes and sexism and sexual harassment in schools. We take these issues seriously and ensure that we embed content on gender equality throughout the curriculum.

We are also committed to a PSHE programme that makes every student feel valued and included and is relevant to them. This means we are committed to an LGBTQI+ inclusive and SEND-inclusive curriculum and are mindful of the SEND Code of Practice 2015 when planning for this subject. We also ensure that we consider the religious and cultural background of all students when teaching RSHE.

6. Junior School RSHE Programme Outline

Nursery

Learning includes:

- Naming body parts, including external genitalia, what areas of the body are private and should not be touched (unless the child gives consent).

Reception-Lower I

Learning includes:

- Naming body parts, including external genitalia and discussion of what makes girls and boys different.
- What areas of the body are private and should not be touched (unless the child gives consent).
- Situations which may be risky and who they can talk to if they are worried.
- The concept of ‘keeping something confidential or secret’.

Upper I

Learning includes:

- The emotional and physical changes of growing up, coping with strong emotions (puberty)
- Looking after our bodies (including personal hygiene), how to be safe and healthy.
- Discuss issues covered in previous years: names of body parts, acceptable and unacceptable contact and keeping secrets.
- Body image

Upper II and Lower III

Learning includes:

- Puberty - Learning that we all go through physical and emotional changes but the age at which changes happen will depend on their own personal ‘body clock’.
- Menstruation
- Reproduction
- Body Image
- Healthy and Unhealthy Relationships
- Go back over issues from previous years: names of body parts, acceptable and unacceptable contact and keeping secrets.

7. Safe & Effective Practice

At the heart of many subjects within RSHE there is a focus on keeping our students safe, and we are aware that the School can play an important role in preventative education. Good practice allows our students to have an open forum to discuss potentially sensitive issues.

Personal Beliefs

The personal beliefs and attitudes of teachers will not influence their teaching of RSHE.

Language and Ground Rules in Lessons

Ground rules help to minimise inappropriate and unintended disclosures and comments of a negative nature made towards other students, whether intentional or not. They are also paramount to effectively managing discussions that might elicit strong opinions.

To be effective, students and teachers need to develop ground rules together and then test them in discussion and group activities, amending them as necessary. Examples of ground rules include:

- **Openness**: We will be open and honest but not discuss directly our own or others' personal/private lives. We will discuss examples but will not use names or descriptions that could identify anyone.
- **Keep the conversation in the room**: We feel safe discussing issues and we know that our teacher will not repeat what is said in the classroom unless they are concerned, we are at risk, in which case they will follow the school's safeguarding policy.
- **Non-judgmental approach**: It is okay for us to disagree with another person's point of view, but we will not judge, make fun of, or put anybody down. We will 'challenge the opinion, not the person'.
- **Right to pass**: Taking part is important. However, we have the right to pass on answering a question or participating in an activity and we will not put anyone 'on the spot'.
- **Make no assumptions**: We will not make assumptions about people's values, attitudes, behaviours, identity, life experiences or feelings. We will listen to the other person's point of view respectfully and expect to be listened to ourselves.
- **Using appropriate language**: We will use correct terms rather than slang terms, as they can be offensive. If we are not sure what the correct term is, we will ask our teacher.
- **Asking questions:** We are encouraged to ask questions, and they are valued by our teacher. However, we do not ask personal questions, or anything intended to deliberately try to embarrass someone.
- **Seeking help and advice**: If we need further help or advice, we know how and where to seek it - both in school and in the community. We will encourage friends to seek help if we think they need it.

Dealing with difficult questions

It is important to encourage students to ask questions, but this requires the teacher to feel confident to handle the questions raised. We cannot predict the questions that the students will ask us, and particular topics do not always come up when we expect them to. When spontaneous discussion arises, we will answer the students' questions in a sensitive, honest and age-appropriate manner.

We should also take into consideration the fact that if we leave a question unanswered, that students will seek their information from another source such as the internet, which may lead them to inappropriate content.

We have a variety of strategies for dealing with difficult questions. For example:

- **'Ask it basket' / anonymous question box**: Available before, during and after all lessons, so students can ask questions anonymously at any time. Teachers may look at and prepare answers for questions before the lesson. If teachers are concerned about a question, they may ask anyone whose question has not been answered to come and see them privately.
- **Conscious messages**: Being conscious of the messages teachers may give the rest of the group when responding to a question. Staff may feel that a question has been put in an attempt to embarrass or put them on the spot, but a dismissive answer could dissuade others from asking genuine questions.
- **Age-appropriate answers**: Giving factual, age-appropriate answers when this is possible.
- **Buying time if necessary**: It may be appropriate for staff to explain that they are not sure how best to answer and that they will respond later. If a question is too explicit or is inappropriate, the teacher will attend to it later, on an individual basis and a decision will be taken after consultation with a member of SLT/JLT as to whether to inform the child's parents/carers. In the event of a disclosure, the School's safeguarding procedure will be invoked, and teachers will speak to the DSL as soon as possible.

Distancing

Using distancing techniques such as stories, scenarios, clips from TV programmes or case studies can provide fictional characters and storylines that stimulate discussion whilst 'de-personalising' discussions. This allows students to engage more objectively with the lesson content.

The following or similar questions may be used to support distanced discussion:

- What is happening to them?
- Why might this be happening?
- How are they feeling?
- What are they thinking?
- What do other people think of them?
- Who could help them?
- What would you tell them to do if they asked for help?
- What could you say or do to persuade them to act differently?

Menstruation

Our programme includes preparation for menstruation from UII (year 5). We make appropriate and sensitive arrangements for the changing and disposal of sanitary wear for students (e.g. requests for sanitary protection are dealt with by the School Nurse or by Junior School Form Teachers). There are trained First Aid staff in the office who are used to dealing with sensitive issues. Sanitary towels are made available for students in Upper II, Lower III and all Senior School students in their toilet blocks.

Contraceptive Advice

General advice on contraception forms part of the RSHE programme in the Senior School. If a student seeks contraceptive advice, even if they have been withdrawn from the Sex Education programme, they may be referred to a health professional.

Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual and Transgender (LGBT)

LGBT content is addressed as part of the RSHE programme to ensure that LGBT children and young people, and children and young people with LGBT families, see themselves reflected in what they learn. It also encourages all young people to grow up with inclusive and accepting attitudes.

At the point at which we consider it appropriate to teach our students about LGBT, we will ensure that this content is fully integrated into our programmes of study for this area of the curriculum rather than delivered as a standalone unit or lesson.

In the Junior School this will involve teaching students about the society in which they are growing up, to foster respect for others and for difference, and to educate students about healthy relationships. We aim to challenge stereotypes and celebrate differences when teaching children about relationships and families including LGBT families, which means teaching children about families with different kinds of structures, e.g. two Mums or two Dads.

Confidentiality and safeguarding

Good practice allows students an open forum to discuss potentially sensitive issues. Such discussions can lead to increased safeguarding reports. Students should be made aware of how to raise their concerns or make a report and how any report will be handled. This should include processes when they have a concern about a friend or peer.

All staff should know what to do if a student tells them that they are being abused or neglected or are witnessing abuse. Staff should know how to manage the requirement to maintain an appropriate level of confidentiality and involve only those who need to be involved, e.g. the Designated Safeguarding Lead (DSL).

Students are made aware that not all information can be kept confidential, and they will be helped to understand that if certain disclosures are made, certain actions will follow. Staff should never promise a child that they will not tell anyone about a report of abuse, as this may ultimately not be in the best interests of the child.

In the event of disclosure of abuse, the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection procedures will be followed.

In the event of disclosure of pregnancy, information and advice will be sought from a health professional. The School will always encourage students to talk to their parents /carers and will provide help in doing so if the student requests this. If the student tells her parent(s)/carers, the responsibility lies with the parent(s)/carer. If the student refuses to tell her parent(s)/carer, staff will refer her to a health professional if a health professional is not already involved. If the student is under sixteen, the member of staff who has been informed should report the incident to the Head who will consult about informing the parent(s)/carer.

Outside Agencies and Visitors

Visitors who may be invited to help with the delivery of Sex Education will be made aware of the ethos of the school and will work within the guidelines of this policy.

Complaints Procedure

Any concerns about the Relationship and Sex Education curriculum may be reported to the appropriate member of staff or directly to the Head. See Section 8 below.

8. Safeguarding

All teachers at The Abbey School are made aware of the safeguarding procedures regarding all types of abuse and receive regular safeguarding training. Any queries regarding safeguarding policy or procedures should be referred to the DSL or Deputy DSL. The Safeguarding Policy is available to all on the school website.

9. Engaging Stakeholders

PSHE education is a partnership between schools and parents. Engaging with parents about the content of our PSHE programme, including RSHE, is an important part of providing a high-quality programme.

In the Junior School, staff work closely with parents to ensure that they are aware of what is being taught. All parents from Nursery-Lower III are sent a copy of our document, 'PSHE and RSHE at the Abbey Junior School'.

Parents of Upper Junior students are invited to attend a consultation meeting to discuss the school's RSHE programme and to view the teaching materials and resources that will be used. A parent who is concerned about any element of this policy, or is unhappy about their child's participation, should discuss their feelings with the Head. Parents have the right to withdraw their children from all or part of those aspects of the Sex Education programme which are NOT part of the statutory National Curriculum Science Orders. If requested, alternative arrangements will be made for individual students. There is no right to withdraw from Relationships or Health Education.

Parents should be made aware of the benefits of receiving this important education and any detrimental effects that withdrawal might have on the child, for example, hearing their peers' version of what was said in class rather than what was said by the teacher, and any social and emotional effects of being excluded.

In the Senior School written communication is provided to parents regarding RSHE topics at the beginning of the school year. Any parent who wishes to discuss the curriculum content is welcome to meet with the Head of PSHE to discuss their concerns.

10. Monitoring, Reporting and Evaluation

We regularly monitor our RSHE scheme of work to ensure that the quality of teaching is consistent, that the curriculum is meeting the national requirements under the Relationships Education, RSHE and Health Education guidance, and that learning outcomes are reflective of student need.

To ensure that this policy and the RSHE programme are effective, there is opportunity for student 1-1 reflection (both for the start of year and end) and this is built into the scheme of work for all year groups. Student voice is central to the culture and ethos of The Abbey School. We use student voice to evaluate how relevant and engaging RSHE is to children's lives.

Throughout our RSHE scheme of work we embed student voice practices to enable students to express their views on the range of topics and issues that RSHE covers and to ensure that they listen to other opinions and evidence, reflect on their own perspectives and take a broader view. We want to ensure that all voices are heard but that those views that are hurtful, offensive or exclusionary do not dominate and are addressed. We want to ensure a culture where human rights, social justice, inclusion and diversity are promoted.

In addition, form teachers and members of staff delivering the content are asked to provide directed, written feedback on topics covered, and to provide recommendations for improvement.

As members of The PSHE Association we are able to access the most up to date resources and ensure that we are monitoring and informed of statutory changes as they arise.

11. Equal Opportunities

RSHE is inclusive of all students; they have an equal entitlement to good quality RSHE. The programme is delivered in line with the school's Equal Opportunities Policy within an atmosphere of mutual respect. The whole school community supports an approach that ensures that no individual will be discriminated against on grounds of gender, race, disability, religion or belief, or sexual orientation.

If a student is absent from school and does not participate in the RSHE programme, the school will ensure that teaching materials are made available. In the Junior School, 'catch up' Science sessions will be delivered.

Resources selected to support the programme will be free from cultural bias wherever possible and will avoid gender, race, disability or sexual orientation stereotyping. The programme will be sensitive to the needs of all students in the school. We aim to celebrate differences and challenge gender stereotypes.

12. Additional Resources

- PSHE Association
- Statutory RSHE
- Relationships Education, Relationships and Sex Education and Health Education (DfE July 2019)