



# RELATIONSHIPS and SEXUALITY EDUCATION POLICY

---

## Belfast High School

*Date: September 2024*

*Date Ratified: 25 September 2024*

*Ratified by: Board of Governors*

*Responsibility: Board of Governors*

*Author: Vice Principal*

*Review Date: September 2027*

## **INTRODUCTION**

The Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) policy reflects the ethos of the School and the guidance provided by DE, EA, CCEA and DHSSPS. It aims to encourage pupils to develop respect for themselves and others, to foster an understanding of healthy friendships and relationships and to develop responsible behaviour and the ability to make informed decisions within a social, moral and spiritual framework.

RSE is a lifelong process, which encompasses the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills, and the development of attitudes, beliefs, morals and values about personal and social relationships and gender issues.

## **DEFINITION**

RSE is a lifelong process encompassing the acquisition of knowledge, understanding and skills; and the development of attitudes, beliefs and values about sexual identity, relationships and intimacy.

## **ETHOS AND VALUES**

RSE is delivered 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 identity or 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.

## **AIMS**

- To develop positive, healthy responsible relationships in a moral, social and spiritual framework;
- To recognise and be aware of different forms of abuse and to develop skills to help keep themselves safe;
- To increase understanding among pupils of pertinent issues and give accurate information to help correct misunderstanding and help them make informed decisions and choices;
- To encourage an appreciation of the value of marriage, family life and other long-term relationships;
- To accept the characteristics of others and their own sexuality and to develop within pupils a respect for both their own and other people's bodies;
- To prepare pupils to cope with the physical, social and emotional challenges of growing up and so help better prepare them for adult life;
- To provide pupils with the knowledge base needed to make informed decisions;
- To appreciate their parents/carers and their role within the family and the responsibilities of parenthood;
- To have coping strategies to deal with relationships when they break down;
- To appreciate the value of human life;
- To encourage pupils to make informed decisions based on the information presented to them. Also pupils who hold differing views are able to do so in an environment without threat.

## **A RIGHTS RESPECTING SCHOOL**

Belfast High School is a Rights Respecting School, recognised through the UNICEF Rights Respecting School Award.

A Rights Respecting School teaches and actively promotes awareness of child rights and models rights and respect in all its relationships – between adults and pupils, between adults and between pupils. Pupils are aware of their rights as outlined in the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and the importance of ensuring that their behaviours uphold their rights and those of their peers.

*[https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2014/12/RSSA\\_Good\\_Practice\\_Review.pdf](https://www.unicef.org.uk/rights-respecting-schools/wp-content/uploads/sites/4/2014/12/RSSA_Good_Practice_Review.pdf)*

## **DELIVERY OF RSE**

Elements of RSE will be delivered through the Personal Development strand of Learning for Life and Work (LLW), Biology, Religious Education, Child Development and through other elements of the School's pastoral programme.

## **EXTERNAL AGENCIES**

External speakers will also deliver elements of the RSE curriculum. The School recognises the expertise provided by individuals and those from statutory and voluntary organisations.

Before agreeing to use an external agency, teachers will: review resources that are to be used; inform parents/carers if applicable; ensure the input is in harmony with the School's RSE programme; inform pupils of the purpose of the visit. A teacher will be present during all presentations.

The School recognises the changing nature of society and the influence of the home on a child's development, and lessons will be delivered in a sensitive and thoughtful manner.

It is important to acknowledge that there may be different thoughts and perspectives between females and males and their differing views need to be respected. While pupils will usually be taught in mixed groups, it may be necessary at times to deliver areas of the programme to boys and girls in single groups.

## **SPECIFIC ISSUES**

### **The Status of the Family**

The School promotes the value of long-term stable relationships including marriage, while acknowledging the diversity of family life that exists within society.

### **Confidentiality**

The classroom is an open environment and confidentiality cannot be maintained. Therefore, staff and pupils are not encouraged to talk about their personal relationships or experiences during class discussions.

Staff have a professional responsibility to share relevant information about the protection of children with other professionals, particularly investigative agencies and when physical or sexual abuse is suspected, a legal duty to report this.

If a child confides in a member of staff and requests that the information be kept secret, it is important that the member of staff should tell the child, sensitively, that he or she has a responsibility to refer cases or alleged abuse to the appropriate agencies for the child's own sake. Staff who receive information about children and their families in the course of their work should share their information only within appropriate professional contexts.

### **Safeguarding and Child protection**

Staff should be aware that pupils may be victims of abuse and it is accepted that it can be dealt with in two ways. Primarily to refer information that may arise to the Designated Teacher who will implement the School's Safeguarding and Child Protection procedure. Secondly through the teaching of the preventative curriculum. Pupils may be supported through the promotion of self-esteem management of emotions and through skills of assertiveness.

Should any pupil raise an issue that the teacher deems is beyond the level of maturity of the class, the teacher will arrange to speak to the child after class and may discuss the issue with the child's parents/carers and inform a member of the Safeguarding Team.

### **Withdrawal from class**

While there is no statutory right to withdraw a child from classes which include RSE content, any parents/carers who do not wish their children to participate in classes which have RSE content should contact the School and the School will endeavour to make alternative arrangements. Parents/carers should contact a relevant member of staff to discuss this confidentially.

### **Terminology**

The use of proper terms for parts of the body and body functions will be used. It is very important proper terminology is used in class activities and that the tone of discussion is respectful and genuine.

### **The Value of Human Life**

Pupils should acquire the knowledge to make sound value judgements on issues such as euthanasia and abortion in a non-judgemental and non-confrontational atmosphere. The input of all pupils is valued. The RSE curriculum is delivered in line with DENI Circular 2024/01 which states that pupils should "Receive age appropriate, comprehensive and scientifically accurate education on sexual and reproductive health and rights, covering prevention of early pregnancy and access to abortion."

### **Gender Identity and Sexual Orientation**

*"All pupils have the right to learn in a safe, welcoming and inclusive 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".* Equality Commission

All pupils will be valued and treated with respect regardless of sexual orientation, gender identity, religion, ethnicity etc. Staff should handle the issue of sexual orientation and gender in a sensitive non-confrontational and reassuring way.

Teachers, whatever their personal views, will act to counteract prejudice and support the development of self-esteem and personal responsibility in all pupils. Pupils will be encouraged to show tolerance and respect to those who hold different values to their own. The School promotes equality for all pupils.

Bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation, is as unacceptable as it is in any other situation, where someone is mistreated or bullied because of their differences from those who are perceived to be the majority. All issues relating to bullying on the grounds of sexual orientation or identification or any other form of homophobic abuse will not be tolerated and will be dealt with in line with the School's Anti-Bullying Policy.

### **Pastoral Support**

The School takes its role in the promotion of student welfare very seriously. Staff endeavour to provide caring and sensitive pastoral support and make themselves approachable for pupils.

The Ascertainment counselling service and EA youth worker are available to offer additional pastoral support for all pupils.

### **RELATED DOCUMENTS**

- CCEA Guidance for Post Primary Schools: Relationships and Sexuality Education 2015
- CCEA Personal Development NI Curriculum 2007
- DHSS Sexual Health Promotion: Strategy and Action Plan 2008 – 2013
- DENI Circular 2010/01
- DENI Circular 2013/16
- DENI Circular 2015/22
- DENI Circular 2024/01
- The Relationships and Sexuality Education (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2023
- Equality Commission's Eliminating Sexual Orientation Discrimination in NI, March 2009
- Sexual Offences (NI) Order 2008 – Revised February 2009
- Supporting Trans Youth in Education. Youthnet, Genderjam and SailNI
- Guidance for Schools on Preventing and Responding to Sexist, Sexual and Transphobic Bullying. Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF)

### **ASSOCIATED POLICIES**

Anti-Bullying Policy  
E-Safety and ICT Acceptable Use Policy  
Pastoral Care Policy  
Safeguarding and Child Protection Policy  
SEN policy

### **REVIEW**

This policy will be kept under review by the Board of Governors, in line with the School's Policy Review Schedule.